The Religion of the Psalms

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THE RELIGION OF THE PSALMS

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THE RELIGION OF THE PSALMS

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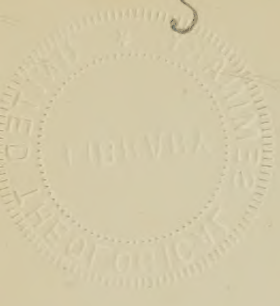

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PREFACE

Books about the Psalms come and go; the Psalms go on forever. They belong to the permanent literature of the race. They express felicitously and adequately the great emotions of mankind. They display a faith that passes knowledge, an invincible confidence in the goodness of God that survived successive shocks testing it to the uttermost. The genuine, heartfelt religion of the Psalter has never failed to kindle the spirit of the faithful.

The aim of this book is to bring out the significance of the Psalms as indicative of the religious and moral standards of later Judaism. There is no attempt here to find in the Psalms spiritual nourishment for the life of today. The effort is rather to present the meaning of the Psalms as it lay in the minds of their authors and earliest readers. Probably no book has suffered more from a conventionalized interpretation than the Psalter. We need

frequently to return to the original source of the stream of interpretation and start afresh. No conventionalized Psalter can ever have the virility and freshness of the real Psalter.

It is because of this desire to preserve as much as possible the original atmosphere of the Psalter that the form "Yahweh" is used instead of "Lord." This is, approximately at least, the original pronunciation of the name more commonly known as "Jehovah." The latter form has gathered to itself a connotation that never attached to Yahweh and that interferes with any historical appreciation of the Hebrew God.

In the quotations of poetical passages from the Psalter and elsewhere, I have ofter ventured to use translations of my own. This has been done, not with the thought that they are better than other renderings, but with the desire to bring the thoughts and aspirations of these Hebrew poets before the reader's mind in a somewhat new and unfamiliar dress.

Thus they may more successfully challenge attention and secure respect and admiration.

Some of the chapters of this book have been used as lectures for general audiences. The favorable reception accorded them emboldens me to send them out to a larger circle. May they contribute something to the quickening of an intelligent interest in the religious poetry of Israel.

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I

THE HYMN BOOK OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

Every piece of literature must be interpreted and estimated in the light of the times and circumstances amid which it came into being, and with reference to the purpose that produced it. The Psalter claims no exemption from the operation of this rule. By reason of long-continued use, attended by a wholly uncritical attitude of mind, the Psalms have come to acquire a conventional significance and a timeless value. But if we would know the Psalter as it really is and venerate it for its worth's sake, we must look into its original purpose and use in order to recover its original spirit. By such a search, the Psalter loses nothing of its real value and gains much in the way of intelligibility and freshness.

That the Psalter was the hymn book of the Second Temple has long been

recognized by scholars. The evidence of such usage is convincing. Psalms were sung regularly in connection with the tamîdh, i.e., the daily burnt offering (Dan. 8:11 ff.). The musical annotations contained in so many of the superscriptions are most easily accounted for as instructions for the leaders of the temple choir. The Books of Chronicles give a large place to the "singers" in the temple ritual (I Chron. 9:4–34; 15:16–24), and speak positively in several cases of the use of musical instruments and psalms in public worship. In I Chron. 16:4–36, for example, reference is made to arrangements for the musical part of the services and Psalm 96 is given in full as one of the songs sung. Parts of Psalms 105 and 106 are associated with it.

Hymn books, however, fall out of use unless they are kept up to date. The history of our own hymnology is illuminating at this point. We do not and cannot sing the hymns our fathers sang, unless they meet the needs of our own souls and accord with the aesthetic and theological

standards of our day. Consequently the old hymnals are continually revised. Some hymns are entirely omitted as unsuitable to our age, while others are modified in such a way as to render them unobjectionable. No longer ago than 1818 A.D. a hymn from the New Light movement among Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians had these two lines:

> I know not any sect or part,
> But such as are New Lights in heart.

Nine years before that, a certain Mr. Parkinson, feeling that the hymns of his day were unendurably bad, issued a "revised and improved" edition. One of his refrains ran as follows:

> Then be entreated now to stop,
> For unless you warning take,
> Ere you are aware you'll drop
> Into the burning lake.

A Baptist hymnal published by Joshua Smith in 1784 was capable of this:

> The tree of life my soul hath seen,
> Laden with fruit and always green;
> The trees of nature fruitless be,
> Compared with Christ the Apple Tree.

No less a hymn writer than Isaac Watts, many of whose hymns we still delight to use, issued a collection in the year 1707 from which the following gruesome bit is taken:

> There the dark earth and gloomy shades
> Shall clasp their naked body round,
> And welcome their delicious limbs
> With the cold kisses of the ground.
>
> Pale death shall riot on their souls,
> Their flesh shall noisome vermin eat,
> The just shall in the morning rise
> And find their tyrants at their feet.

But to banish this voice from the tombs from our ears, we may listen to a stanza from a seventeenth century hymnal, which is supremely incongruous:

> Ye monsters of the briny deep,
> Your Maker's praises spout;
> Up from the deep ye codlings peep,
> And wag your tails about.

The process of revision and emendation always goes on wherever religion is a vital and growing experience. There is no greater need in worship today than for

the appearance of hymn writers who shall produce hymns that are in keeping with the new social, religious, and theological thought of our day. The Psalter shared this experience of revision. Had it not done so, it would have been an almost unique exception in the religious literature of the Hebrews. The whole Old Testament was subjected to repeated revisions in order to keep it abreast of the advancing religious thought of Israel. This is no mere theory of critical scholarship, but is attested by actual facts. One of the clearest examples of this is furnished by a comparison of the materials in Samuel and Kings on the one hand with the contents of the Books of Chronicles on the other. It at once appears that the Chronicler has made use of exactly the same materials as were used in the older work. Large sections of these two editions of the ancient history run parallel, being practically identical, *verbatim et literatim*. But the Chronicler was not content merely to repeat the work of his

predecessors; he is concerned rather to reinterpret the ancient history in such a way as to make it convey the lessons that he wished to inculcate in the minds of his contemporaries. So he does not hesitate to supplement his predecessors' narrative, to modify it more or less to suit his purpose, yea, even occasionally to contradict it flatfooted. For example, II Sam. 24:1 naïvely says that "the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them, saying: Go, number Israel and Judah." But obedience to this divine leading brought a pestilence from Yahweh upon Israel. The ethics of this procedure did not satisfy the Chronicler; hence his account of the same transaction reads, "And Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel" (I Chron. 21:1). The kings Asa and Jehoshaphat of Judah are credited by the Books of Kings with the removal of the high places from Judah (I Kings 15:14; 22:43); the Chronicler flatly denies to them this

achievement (II Chron. 14:5; 17:6). Cf. also II Kings 12:21 with II Chron. 24:26, noting that the Chronicler adds to the names of the murderers of King Joash the information that their mothers were respectively an Ammonitess and a Moabitess and keeping in mind that Chronicles was produced in the later period when a strong influence was working against the marriage of Jews with non-Jews.

It is quite evident from the facts in the Psalter itself that the hands of editors were long busied with the editing of the Psalms. The Psalter in its present form constitutes a collection of earlier and smaller psalters. We find such in groups of psalms assigned to David, to Korah, and to Asaph, and in the Songs of Ascents (Pss. 121 ff.). These, together with many anonymous psalms, have been brought together and organized into five books, viz., Book I containing Psalms 1–14; Book II including Psalms 42–72; Book III numbering Psalms 73–89; Book IV stopping with Psalm 106; and Book V closing the Psalter. Each of

these books has been provided with a closing doxology; see Pss. 41:12; 72:18, 19; 89:51; 106:47; and 150, which is a doxology throughout and furnishes a fitting close to the entire Psalter. Sometimes this editorial work has gone too far, as in the case of Psalms 42 and 43 which are in reality but one psalm, as is shown by the common refrain in 42:5, 11 and 43:5. Sometimes it was not thorough enough as appears from the fact that some materials are duplicated. Ps. 40:14–18 is identical with Psalm 70; Psalm 14 is repeated as Psalm 53; the same sort of repetition appears in Pss. 31:2–4 and 71:1–3, in 57:8–12 and 108:2–6, in 60:7–14 and 108:7–14.

Another type of editorial work upon the Psalms is shown in the superscriptions which they now carry. It is the conclusion of scholars in general that these headings were attached to their respective psalms at a relatively late date in the history of the Psalter. The wish to know under what circumstances and by whom a

favorite song or hymn was written is a very natural and common one. The Jewish community was very solicitous about these things. Where facts were not at hand, they gave free play to their imagination. In the Greek version of the Psalms, which was made at a much earlier time than that in which the oldest of our existing manuscripts of the Hebrew text was written, and was indeed the Bible used throughout the Greek world in the days of the early church, many of the Psalms which have no superscription in the Hebrew text are provided with headings. For example, in the Septuagint David is credited with the authorship of Psalms 33, 43, 67, 71, 91, 93–99, 104, and 137, which have no superscriptions in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, the Septuagint contains an extra psalm, No. 151, and this too is assigned to David. Further, Haggai and Zechariah are made responsible by the Greek translators for Psalms 146–148. It is interesting and illuminating to discover that one of these

"Davidic" psalms comes from the lips of exiles who say,

> By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat,
> Yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion
> [Psalm 137].

The reader can but wonder whether the editors who attached the superscriptions to the Psalms in the Hebrew text were any more critically minded. We see the process of creating authors and situations for the Psalms in full swing in the Greek translation, which was made before the Canon was closed. How much further back is the stream of tradition as represented in the superscriptions to be traced, and were the predecessors of the translators any better informed than their successors? These are questions to which no confident answer can be given.

One bit of editorial work is worthy of special notice. A close examination of the Psalter reveals the fact that in certain sections the Psalms are arranged in accordance with an organizing principle. That is to say, Psalms 1–41 and 84–150 employ

the name Yahweh by preference and almost to the exclusion of other designations of the Deity; but Psalms 42–83 with equal consistency exclude that name and use the general term *Elohim*, meaning God. This is, of course, not accidental. Indeed the only difference between Psalms 14 and 53 is that the former uses Yahweh and the latter speaks of *Elohim*. These two groups of psalms either come from different theological centers, or have been through the hands of different editors. Perhaps the editor of the *Elohim* psalms objected to the use of a proper name for the Deity, realizing that it was a relic of an earlier stage of thought in which gods had to be differentiated one from another and identified by special names just like men. In any case, the different terms employed for the Deity reflect different theological interpretations or views of God.

The Psalms thus seem to have gone through several hands and to have suffered not a few things in the course of that

history. It is a history that must have covered some time. From the writing of the individual songs by various individual authors at different times and places, through the gathering together of such poems into little local collections in different localities, followed by the process of amalgamating these various collections into one general collection—perhaps not all at one time, but by gradual stages—with time allowed between the successive forms of the growing Psalter for the addition of superscriptions and the touching up and pruning down of obsolescent elements in the Psalms—all this demands an adequate period of time for its accomplishment. At the end of such a long-continued and unceasing revision, the Psalms would not be the same as they were at its beginning. What lies before us in the Psalter is that which commended itself to the judgment of the successive editorial groups and so survived. It is safe to say also that it was a "survival of the fittest."

We must, however, be careful in defining the content of the word "fittest." This definition must be made in the light of our general proposition that the Psalter was the hymn book of the Second Temple. A hymn book in general use is never the exponent of the advanced thought of the age to which it belongs. If it were, it would not find general acceptance. It rather reflects the thought and aspiration of the average man. It must make its appeal to the common intelligence, faith, and hope, if it is to succeed. It is not until the new thought has been taken up into the common consciousness that it finds entry into the common hymn book. The same thing holds true of the Psalter. It is not the exponent of the newer thinking in Judaism, but the repository of the generally accepted ideas and attitudes of the postexilic community. This is seen in the thought of the Psalms upon the meaning of suffering.[1] There is practically no reflection of the influence of the great

[1] See chap. iii.

masterpiece of Hebrew thought upon that subject, viz., the Book of Job. Nor is there any recognition of the idea of vicarious suffering worked out by the author of Isaiah, chapter 53. Both of these interpretations of suffering were current in the period during which the Psalter was taking shape; and yet, the Psalms hold fast to the old views on this perplexing problem and show no uncertainty or limitation in their proclamation even though Job has riddled them through and through. In like manner no clear expression is given to the thought of the responsibility of the individual for his own acts before God. This was an idea that did not find full recognition until the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the early days of Exile. It was too new and unfamiliar to get into the select company of old and familiar ideas constituting the goodly fellowship of the Psalms. The same statements hold good of the idea of life after death.[1] It finds little, if any, recognition in the

[1] See chap. iv.

Psalter, and the explanation is that it did not bulk large in the Hebrew religious consciousness until very late in the post-exilic age. Naturally, therefore, it does not find entry into the people's hymn book. We need not, consequently, turn to the Psalter with any expectation of finding the latest stages in Hebrew religious development on record. It is not a book for the furtherance of progressive thought. It was a popular manual of devotion. New thoughts are never popular. Thinking is not a popular recreation; for the majority it is a painful process. The coming together of the congregation in worship is not facilitated by exercises in hard thinking. Fellowship is found rather in common aspiration and need. To have brought in the newest theological formulas and philosophical questions into the songs of the sanctuary would have been fatal to the harmony of the worshipers. The merit of the Psalter lies not so much in its power of sheer thought as in the success with which it expresses those sentiments

and attitudes of soul that are fundamental in worship. These are so beautifully proportioned and so perfectly phrased that they have, with some freedom in their interpretation, satisfied the needs of worshiping congregations and pious individuals through all the generations until now.

Just as we have no right to demand the most aggressive thinking of the Psalmists, so likewise we may not insist upon the highest poetic achievement throughout. Psalms and hymns for use in public worship are beset by limitations of length and form that preclude the possibility of reaching the greatest heights of poetic power. We do not find the masterpieces of modern poetry in the hymnals of the various peoples. Shakespeare, Milton, Browning, Goethe, Schiller, Dante, and their peers could not have found full freedom for their great powers in the writing of hymns.[1]

[1] In support of this proposition, attention may be called to a paragraph from an editorial in the *London Mercury* for 1920 (Vol. I, p. 261), by Mr. J. C. Squire, who is there passing

The greatest poetry of the Old Testament is not found in the Book of Psalms. A community hymnal cannot make large demands upon the intelligence, the imagination, or even the emotions of those who use it. This is the price of its popularity. From the point of view of poetry, pure

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in review the literature published in 1919. He says, "The fact remains that by the common consent of mankind, lyrics alone—even the lyrics of a Heine, a Herrick, or a Burns—will not give a man rank with the greatest poetic artists. It may be that in Poe's sense a work of thousands of lines, which maintains the highest level of poetry, is impossible; that what Professor Quiller-Couch calls 'The Capital Difficulty of Verse' is insuperable; but this does not invalidate the claim of the *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost* to be considered greater than *Lycidas* or the songs of Meleager. That they share in some measure the defects of *The Purple Island* and *Pharonnida* does not prevent *The Fairy Queen* and *Faust* being the greatest of their respective authors' works. From a poet as from another we want something beyond 'jewels five foot long,' the loveliest impressions of the most beautiful particular scenes, reflections of moods, verbal chamber music, momentary vision, sensibility, song. By the common consent of mankind, the greatest things in the world are those works which, while full of beautiful details and informed with the poetic spirit, are moulded to a larger conception and attempt a larger picture of the universe, of the destiny of man, or of the moving life of the world."

and simple, and wholly apart from religious values, the best Hebrew poetry is in the Book of Job and in such vivid and glowing prophetic passages as are found, for example, in the Book of Isaiah and in the second chapter of Nahum. As a matter of fact, some of the Psalms are, from the point of view of poetry, mediocre in quality. Take, by way of example, the historical Psalms, such as 78, 105, 106, and 136, particularly the last mentioned, with its monotonously repetitious refrain. Another group of psalms that do not mount high in the poetic scale is made up of those that subject themselves to alphabetic structure. These are Psalms 9 and 10, in which the initial letters of every other verse in succession, beginning with the second, constitute the Hebrew alphabet; Psalm 37, in which a similar arrangement is found, though it begins with verse 1; Psalms 25, 34, and 145, in which only one verse is allotted to each letter in turn; Psalms 111 and 112, where each line in turn begins with the next letter of the

alphabet; and Psalm 119, the longest psalm in the Psalter and the longest chapter in the Bible, which is organized in stanzas of eight lines each, all eight beginning with the same letter of the alphabet, and each successive stanza of eight verses taking the next letter of the alphabet in turn, as shown in the Revised Version. Acrostic poetry is never of a high order; an acrostic arrangement of any sort is a fetter and most effectively hobbles the gait of Pegasus.

The Psalms of Ascents, or so-called Pilgrim Psalms, are among the best poems of the Psalter. Note for example the stir of movement and the vivid imagery in Psalm 124:

> If it were not that Yahweh was on our side,
> Let Israel now say,
> If it were not that Yahweh was on our side,
> When men rose up against us;
> Then they had swallowed us up alive,
> When their anger burned against us;
> Then the waters had engulfed us,
> The torrent had passed over us;
> Then had passed over us
> The raging waters.

Blessed be Yahweh Who did not give us
A prey to their teeth.
We were delivered, like a bird
From the snare of the fowlers;
The snare was shattered,
And we were delivered.
Our help is in the name of Yahweh,
The Maker of the heavens and earth.

The wonder of the Psalter is, not that there is some poor poetry in it, but that there is so little of that kind. The high level that is almost uniformly maintained challenges comparison with the hymn books of the world. As a hymn book it has nothing to fear on the side of its poetic superiority.

If we are right in describing the Psalter as the "Hymn Book of the Second Temple," we ought to find its function as the mouthpiece of the aspirations and praises of the Jewish community pretty clearly revealed in the text of the Psalms themselves. The worship in the Temple was primarily not a matter of individual and personal significance, but rather a

community function. The sacrifice and the praise were offered mainly in behalf of the people as a whole. The Temple and its worship stood as the nation's representative before Yahweh. The priests were the community's intermediaries with God. This community function is clearly expressed in some of the psalms. See Psalm 46, for example, where the use of the first person plural in verses 1, 2, 7, and 11, and the fact that the inviolability of Zion is the poet's theme, make this clear. Or Psalm 129, in which Israel is introduced as the speaker; and Psalm 74, in which the lamentable history of the Jewish community is brought to God's attention that he may be moved to bestir himself in Israel's behalf; and Psalm 137, in which the sentiments of the Jews in exile are given voice; and Psalm 124 (see pp. 19 and 20), where the community thanks God for past favors.

But in considering the Psalter as the expression of the community's sentiments,

we are straightway confronted by a problem in interpretation. More than one half of the Psalms seem on the face of them to be intensely individualistic. They are full of the pronouns I, my, and me. Who is this ubiquitous individual? How does he come to have so large a space given to him in a congregational hymnal? Can it be that this "I" is the personified community itself speaking? This latter question has been affirmatively answered by many interpreters. Some have carried this interpretation so far as practically to eliminate all individualistic elements from the Psalter. This is one of the most fundamental questions in the interpretation of the Psalms, and well deserves a little attention here.

The early Jewish commentators and Christian interpreters agreed that the "I" was the community. It was not until relatively late in the history of interpretation that an individualistic interpretation came to prevail. Calvin, the great Swiss reformer, had much to do with

bringing about the transfer of emphasis. Early interpretation has some right to be heard, since if there were any tradition reaching back into the distant past, the early interpreters would be likely to reflect it. Then, too, as we have already indicated, the recognition of personal worth and individual responsibility in the sight of God was very slow to come to the fore in Israel. It was one of the newer thoughts in the early postexilic community and as such it would not be likely to obtain the indorsement of the makers of the community's hymnal. The older thought of the nation as the center of interest and the representative of Yahweh in the world would be much more likely to find a welcome in the sacred songs of the Temple. Furthermore, the practice of personification, such as is presupposed by the identification of "I" with the community, is very common in the Old Testament. We at once recall such a phrase as "the virgin daughter of Zion," used to designate the Jewish community. The

most notable case of the sort probably is the application of the term "Servant of Yahweh" in Isaiah, chapters 40–55, to the Jewish nation. There is, therefore, nothing a priori to stand in the way of the interpretation of the "I" of the Psalms as indicating the Jewish community as a whole, at least in some cases.

Now, it turns out that the "I" is actually and definitely so interpreted as representative of Israel in some cases by the language of the Psalms themselves. In Psalm 102, the first eleven verses are given over to a description of distress and suffering that is most intimate and personal in spirit and in phraseology; yet immediately thereupon in verses 12 ff. we read,

> Thou wilt arise, Thou wilt have mercy on Zion;
> For it is the time to favor her,
> For the set time is come—
> For thy servants take pleasure in her stones,
> And her dust they favor.
> And the nations shall fear the name of Yahweh,
> And Kings of the earth Thy glory;
> Because Yahweh has built up Zion, etc.

The whole interest of the Psalm is in the future of Zion, and the long introduction detailing sufferings and sorrows is much more in place if it is the experience of Israel that is being related than it would be if the poet's own personal reactions were being put on record. Another case in point is Psalm 118. In verse 2 we are introduced to Israel as the speaker, and in verses 3 and 4 it is made clear that what we are to hear is community experience and not the author's own personal hopes and fears. When we pass on to verses 10 ff. we read,

All the nations compass me about;
In the name of Yahweh, I will surely cut them off.
They compass me about, yea, they encompass me;
In the name of Yahweh I will surely cut them off.
They compass me about like bees;[1]
In the name of Yahweh, I will surely cut them off.
Thou didst thrust hard at me, that I might fall;
But Yahweh helped me.
Yah is my strength and song,
And He has become my deliverance.

How inadequate any personal experience is to such language as that, and how

[1] The Hebrew has an extra line here which is a later gloss; viz.: "They are quenched like the fire of thorns."

perfectly it fits the undying hope of Judaism! A similar judgment holds good of Psalm 124 (see pp. 19 and 20), where Israel is cited as the speaker in verse 2. In Psalm 3, the same appropriateness of the language to the community is evident, and in the last verse it is upon the people as a whole that the blessing of Yahweh is invoked. Still other psalms that may safely be called community hymns are Psalms 13, 14, 18 (note especially verses 27, 29, and 43 ff.), and 130 (note particularly the last two verses). It seems clear, therefore, that some of the psalms are to be thought of as breathing forth the sentiments of the community life rather than as records of the religious life of individual Jewish saints. But this is not to grant that *all* the Psalms were originally composed as national songs. We must now turn to the evidence that the individual is not without recognition in the Psalter.

In this connection, it may be noted that the comparison of the Psalter with a hymn book ought not to be carried too far. It

is by no means certain that all of the Psalms were originally composed in the expectation that they would be used as part of the service of praise and prayer in public worship. Such an inordinately long psalm as 119 could surely not be sung by even the most enduring of congregations! The same difficulty, though in less degree, applies to Psalm 73. Nor were the Psalms sung by the entire congregation necessarily, but rather by trained Temple choirs. Therefore, the necessity of catering to the common mind would not be quite so keenly felt, though public opinion could not be completely ignored.

It is altogether probable that the ritual of the Babylonian temples gave a great impetus to Jewish ritual in general and to psalm writing and singing in particular. The Babylonians had a fully developed hymnology of their own. Their psalms were not lacking in individualistic strains. Indeed the experiences of individuals occupy a large place in Babylonian psalmody. It is consequently more than

probable that the Jews would follow their Babylonian predecessors in recognizing individual needs and thanksgivings in their hymn book. Then, too, the rights of individuals were clearly set forth long before the close of the Psalter to new additions. The Book of Job is an intensely individualistic piece of literature and it was in existence by the fourth century B.C. The prophet Jeremiah already in the seventh century had in his own personal life made religion a very personal and individual experience. Such a life as his could not fail to leave a profound impress upon the religious consciousness of his people.

But it is when we come to think of the authorship of the Psalms that we are forced to give the individual his full rights. These sacred songs were necessarily written by pious individuals. Literary composition in the very nature of the case is not a community exercise, but an intensely personal and individualistic experience. As the Psalms were composed

by individuals, they must almost necessarily be to a large extent the reflection of individual experience. Certainly some of the Psalms almost preclude anything but an individualist interpretation. Take Psalm 116 by way of illustration:

I love Yahweh because He hath heard
The voice of my supplications,
Because He has inclined His ear unto me;
Hence upon the name of Yahweh I will call.

The cords of death encircled me,
And the straits of Sheol found me.
Trouble and sorrow I find;
Hence upon the name of Yahweh I will call.

Oh, Yahweh, deliver my life!
Gracious is Yahweh and righteous,
And our God is merciful.
A keeper of the simple is Yahweh.
I was brought low and He saved me.

Return to thy resting place, O my soul,
For Yahweh has dealt generously with thee.
For thou hast delivered my life from death,
Mine eyes from tears,
And my feet from stumbling.

I will walk before Yahweh,
In the lands of the living.

I believe that I should speak:
I have been greatly humbled.
I said in my perturbation,
All mankind is treacherous.

How shall I requite to Yahweh
All His benefits to me?
I will take the cup of deliverance;
And upon the name of Yahweh I will call.

My vows to Yahweh I will fulfil,
In the presence of all His people.
Precious in the eyes of Yahweh
Is the death of His saints.

Oh, Yahweh, verily I am Thy servant.
I am Thy servant, the son of Thine handmaid.
Thou hast loosed my bonds.
To Thee I will sacrifice the sacrifice of praise;
And upon the name of Yahweh I will call.

My vows to Yahweh I will fulfil,
In the presence of all His people,
In the courts of the house of Yahweh,
In the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.

These individuals who composed the Psalms did not cease to be patriots when they became poets. In the composition of their hymns, they would naturally express their religio-patriotic feelings and ideals in such a way as to be representa-

tive of the feelings of the pious community as a whole. No man could write a satisfactory hymn for the community who did not fully enter into the inmost recesses of its religious and national enthusiasms. What was the ideal and hope of one typical soul was common to all. What came bursting forth as prayer and praise from one loyal heart was quickly taken up by others and passed from lip to lip until it became a national possession and pride. The interests of the pious individual in Judaism were so closely and inextricably bound up with the interests of the community as a whole that in many cases it is practically impossible to distinguish between personal and community songs. To many a Jew the welfare of Zion was of far greater importance than his own well-being. Such men showed by their heroism in the Maccabaean War that death was preferable in their eyes to disloyalty to the ideals of Zion. When we read or sing the Psalms, therefore, let us remember that we are not only echoing the sentiments of

poets and saints of postexilic Judaism who are otherwise unknown, but we are also joining our hearts and voices in a chorus of prayer and praise that has numbered the Jews of that heroic age and of all succeeding ages, and in turn has been taken up and carried on in fuller volume and with richer harmony by generation after generation of Christian worshipers. The "Hymn Book of the Second Temple" has made for itself a permanent place in the devotional literature of mankind.

II

THE SWEET SINGER OF ISRAEL

The name of David is inseparably associated with the Book of Psalms. The common designation of the Psalter is "The Psalms of David." The natural reason for this is, of course, the fact that seventy-three of the one hundred and fifty psalms in the Hebrew Psalter are by their superscriptions assigned to David. The Septuagint Version of the Psalms does even better by David, assigning fourteen more to him and adding a new one, viz., Psalm 151, which is also his. These "Davidic" Psalms in quality constitute the flower of the Psalter and make up 50 per cent of its contents.

We propose here to examine this tradition of "Davidic" authorship and to estimate its validity. This is a problem of first-class importance for the religion of Israel; for if the tradition in question be correct, the whole modern conception of

the nature and the development of Hebrew literature and religion is in need of radical revision. If these Psalms are rightly assigned to David, then there was no progress in the history of Hebrew religion from the time of David on. It was already mature in the eleventh century B.C. But this is in direct conflict with conclusions seemingly well established in other portions of the Hebrew literature. Hence we must examine the Davidic tradition to see upon what basis it rests and what credence should be given it. We are altogether within our rights when we institute such an investigation. The Old Testament is not exempt from any test that may properly be applied to literature in general. No less a defender of traditional views of scripture than the late Professor William Henry Green, of Princeton Theological Seminary, put himself squarely on record to this effect in the following terms:

> No objection can be made to the demand that the sacred writings should be subjected to the same

critical tests as other literary productions of antiquity. When were they written, and by whom? For whom were they intended, and with what end in view? These are questions that may fairly be asked respecting the several books of the Bible, as respecting other books, and the same criteria that are applicable in the one case are applicable likewise in the other. Every production of any age bears the stamp of that age. It takes its shape from influences then at work. It is part of the life of the period, and can only be properly estimated and understood from being viewed in its original connections. Its language will be the language of the time when it was produced. The subject, the style of thought, the local and personal allusions, will have relation to the circumstances of the period, to which in fact the whole and every part of it must have its adaptation, and which must have their rightful place in determining its true explanation.

Inspiration has no tendency to obliterate those distinctive qualities and characteristics which link men to their own age. It is as true of Paul and Isaiah as it is of Plato and Virgil, that their intellectual life and writings received a peculiar impress from their surroundings. It is by the application of this principle that literary forgeries are detected. The attempt to palm off one's own production as the work of one of a different age and subject to different conditions, is rarely successful. In spite of every precaution, something will leak out to betray the fact that the real circumstances of its origin are different from those that are pretended. If now inspired

writings, like others, are in all their literary aspects the outgrowth of their own age, then the most thorough scrutiny can but explain our faith in their real origin; and if in any instance the view commonly entertained of their origin or authorship is incorrect in any particular, the critical study which detects the error, and assigns each writing to its proper time and place, can only conduce to its being better understood and more accurately appreciated.[1]

We are stimulated to the exercise of the right so freely granted by Professor Green by various facts having a direct bearing upon our problem. For example, we know that the habit of assigning religious writings to great men of the past was very common in the later postexilic period. Solomon is made to have been the author of more than one composition by later editors, viz., the Psalms of Solomon, the Odes of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Solomon. No respectable scholar of any school of interpretation accepts these assignments to Solomon as valid. They are unanimously recognized as the product of the literary activity of the late

[1] William Henry Green, *Moses and the Prophets*, pp. 17, 18.

inter-biblical period. Not only Solomon, but Enoch, Adam, Noah, and the Patriarchs are all credited with literary achievements by these later pseudepigraphic writers. Can we be sure that this habit of ascribing writings to great men of the past did not begin till after the close of the Old Testament Canon? That would be a very unsafe conclusion; indeed it would be in direct conflict with the facts just cited, for the Canon was not closed until long after the pseudepigraphic works here referred to were published. May it not be, then, that some of this pseudepigraphic output found admission into the Canon itself? It is quite generally recognized that the Song of Solomon and the Book of Ecclesiastes are from an age centuries later than Solomon's day. When we turn to the Psalter in the light of these facts, we discover evidence that fully warrants our inquiry. Psalm 53 is assigned to David, and yet in verse 6 it presupposes the captivity of Israel. The temple in Jerusalem was not yet built in

David's reign and yet the "Davidic" psalms repeatedly speak of it as though it were already standing; see Pss. 27:4; 138:2; and 122. How far editors could go in this direction is illustrated by the fact that the Septuagint includes in its extra fifteen "Davidic" psalms, the 137th, which is manifestly a product of exilic experience:

> By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat,
> Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.

If David wrote the psalms credited to him, he was a great poet and a profoundly and intelligently religious man. We, therefore, turn at once to these questions: Was David a poet? And was he a saint? In seeking answers, we shall confine ourselves to the oldest and best sources of information. That means that we shall leave out of account the materials in the Books of Chronicles, because it is quite clear that these two books were not written until long after the Exile, that is, 700 years or so after David's death. The materials in Samuel and Kings regarding David have

likewise, of course, undergone some modification at the hands of editors; but the original narratives are still easily recognizable through the later dress that has been given them. There is in these older sources quite unanimous testimony on the subject of David's poetic ability. In II Sam. 3:33 f. there is given the dirge that David is said to have composed on the occasion of Abner's death:

> Should Abner die as a churl dieth?
> Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet
> brought into fetters;
> As a man falls before the children of iniquity,
> So didst thou fall.

Greater evidence of his poetic power is forthcoming in the dirge over Saul and Jonathan in II Sam. 1:19–27:

> Weep, O Judah, ...
> Grieve, O Israel, over thy dead!
> How are the mighty fallen!
>
> Tell it not in Gath;
> Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon;
> Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice;
> Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

Be thou withered, O Gilboa;
Let there be neither dew nor rain upon you,
O fields of death;
For there was rejected the shield of a warrior,
The shield of Saul,
The weapon of one anointed with oil.

From the blood of the slain,
From the fat of warriors,
The bow of Jonathan turned not back,
And the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan, the beloved and the lovely,
In their life and in their death were not separated;
They were swifter than eagles;
They were stronger than lions.

Ye daughters of Israel, weep for Saul,
Who clothed you with scarlet and fine linen,
Who put golden ornaments upon your clothing.
How are the mighty fallen, in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan, when thou didst die, I was overcome.
I am distressed for thee, O Jonathan, my brother!
Thou wast very dear to me;
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Beyond the love of women.

How are the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished.

There is no good reason for doubting David's authorship of these elegies. We

may add to this testimony, the tradition represented in Amos 6:5, which associates David's name with the use of musical instruments, and that account of his introduction to Saul which makes his ability as a musician responsible for his appearance at court. This points to his having been on the same order as the medieval bards and troubadours who composed, played the accompaniment to, and sang their own ballads. When we likewise recognize the fact that this tradition of psalm authorship would hardly have attached itself to the name of one who had no poetical or musical ability whatsoever, it seems quite safe to accept the tradition that David was a poet and a musician as fully established.

We now turn to the consideration of David's religious life and thought. That he was a sincerely and deeply religious man lies beyond the peradventure of a doubt. He took no important step without submitting the proposition to Yahweh and awaiting His decision, which he sought

by means of the oracle (I Sam. 23:2; II Sam. 2:1). He showed himself in sympathy with and obedient to the prophets of Yahweh, viz., Gad and Nathan (II Sam. 12:1–25; 24:13, 14, 18). He displayed great zeal in his determination to bring the ark of Yahweh into Jerusalem his capital city (II Sam. chap. 6). One of the most convincing evidences of the fineness and depth of his religious instincts is afforded by his demeanor near the well of Bethlehem. Finding himself in the thick of battle in close proximity to that well whence he had obtained many a refreshing drink as a lad, he spontaneously expressed his longing for the cooling water, saying, "Oh for a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" Immediately three of his heroic warriors broke through the encircling lines of the foe and at the risk of their lives secured the coveted water for their leader. But David took it and "poured it out as a drink-offering to Yahweh, saying, 'Far be it from me, O Yahweh, that I should

do this. Shall I drink the blood of men who went in jeopardy of their lives?' And so he would not drink it" (II Sam. 23:15 ff.). No wonder that his men almost worshiped him!

But we must look further and learn what was the content or nature of David's religion. Was it the kind of religion that must be credited to the writer of the psalms ascribed to him? Let us take up first the ethical aspect of his life. The first thing that leaps into view naturally is the Bathsheba episode. This was something more than an act of sexual lust, due to a powerful but passing passion. In a sense that was the smallest part of his crime. This tragedy also reveals a capacity for deceit and duplicity that is beyond contempt, and it came to full fruition in murder by proxy such as that for which a Chicago police captain was sent to the electric chair a few years ago. Nor was this an isolated case; deceit and treachery were ever ready in his hands. He was driven into flight by Saul who sought his life.

In his hasty escape he stopped at Nob where there was a sanctuary, and attendant priesthood. Greeted hospitably by the chief priest, David explained to him that he was on a confidential mission in behalf of King Saul and that the matter was so urgent that he had had time to supply himself with neither food nor weapons. On the basis of this tissue of falsehood, Abimelech provided him with what he needed to send him on his way (I Sam. 21:2–10). When Saul heard of this kindness to his foe, he ordered the slaughter of the entire priestly community. David, upon hearing of this ghastly deed, remarked, "I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would certainly tell Saul. I have brought about the death of all the members of thy father's house" (I Sam. 22:20–22). But his knowledge of Doeg's attitude did not prevent him from going ahead with his own program regardless of the outcome for his priestly host. He treated his Philistine protectors in the same deceitful and

heartless way. Achish, King of Gath, welcomed him and gave him a place of abode on the southern edge of the territory of Gath. David used the advantage of his position, remote from the king's capital and adjacent to southern clans that were friendly to Philistia but hostile to Judah, to make raids upon these neighboring villages and destroy them, leaving neither man, woman, nor child alive to tell the tale. Everyone of these raids was against the allies of Achish, and meant the weakening of Philistine power. But when Achish would ask David after one of his raids, "'Whither did you make a raid today?' David said, 'Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites.' . . . . And Achish believed David, saying, 'He has made the people Israel utterly to abhor him; and so he will be my servant for ever.'" One of the worst manifestations of this treacherous and vengeful spirit is that recorded in I Kings 2:5–9. Joab had been David's

most loyal and efficient commander-in-chief. He had been friend enough to David to go contrary to his wishes when to have obeyed them would have wrought harm to the king and kingdom. But Joab had violated the ethical code of those days in his murder of Abner (II Sam. 3:27 f.) and again in his cowardly murder of Amasa (II Sam. 20:8 f.). Because of these things, which he had overlooked at the time of their commission when Joab was very useful to him, and because of other things such as the killing of Absalom (II Sam. 18:14 f.) which David had never forgotten, he enjoins his son Solomon to do away with the old warrior at the first good opportunity, thus passing on to his son that which he himself would have rejoiced to do if he had only dared. Similarly in the case of Shimei, though he had sworn to protect him when he might have killed him and brought little if any blame upon himself, yet now upon his deathbed he appoints Solomon his executioner.

Verily, "the ruling passion strong in death."[1]

Another stain upon David's name, from the point of view of later times, is the fact that he was a polygamist. In addition to Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, Abigail the Carmelitess, Michal the daughter of Saul, Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite, Maacah the daughter of Talmai King of Geshur, Haggith the mother of Adonijah, Abital the mother of Shephatiah, and Eglah the mother of Ithream (II Sam. 3:2–4), all of whom he married before leaving Hebron, we read, "David took him more concubines[2] and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron.

[1] Many interpreters of I Kings 2:5–9 relieve David of the stigma of this story by declaring this passage to be of far later origin and not a trustworthy record. But the farther down this passage is brought in time the harder is it to account for the origin of such a tale. The more David became idealized the less and less likely is it that tales of this sort should have been concocted about him and put into the religious record. As a matter of fact the things here narrated are entirely in keeping with the David we learn to know in the oldest sources.

[2] II Sam. 20:3 speaks of ten concubines.

And there were yet sons and daughters born to David. And these are the names of those that were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon, and Ibhar, and Elishua, and Nepheg, and Japhia, and Elishama, and Eliada, and Eliphalet" (II Sam. 5:13–16).

It need hardly be said that David was not wholly without redeeming features morally. The low standards of his age must always be borne in mind. The way in which he bound his personal followers to him in deathless devotion argues convincingly for the possession of qualities on David's part that marked him as a leader among men. But when we have done full justice to David's personal character, it still remains to be asked whether or not a man of such low ideals and attainments as are revealed by the facts we have cited could have written such lofty psalms as many of those ascribed to him. Notice at how many points Psalm 15, for example, runs counter to the facts of David's own life:

Yahweh, who may sojourn in Thy tent?
Who may dwell in Thy holy hill?
He who walks blamelessly and works righteousness,
And speaks truth in his heart,
In whose tongue there is no deceit.
He does no injury to his friend,
Nor does he bear reproach against his neighbors.
The one doing evil is despised in his eyes,
But those who fear Yahweh he honors.
He swears to his own hurt and changes not.
He does not give out his money on interest;
Nor has he taken a bribe against the innocent.
He who does such things shall never be moved.

The situation does not improve when we move over into the theological aspect of David's religion. We begin with the bringing up of the ark into Jerusalem (II Sam. 6:12–23). Here David is at great pains to do Yahweh honor. Nothing irreverent or unseemly would be tolerated for a moment. Yet David danced along the highway in such a state of nudity and abandon that his wife Michal observing him from a window was scandalized. Nor is there any reason to suppose that Michal, after a somewhat exciting marital career, was in any sense a prude. But

David verily thought that he was pleasing Yahweh. What sort of a conception of God did he have?

We ask the same question when we read the story of the famine in II Sam. 21:1–14. We are there told that Saul had broken the oath of Israel to the Gibeonites in that he had slain some of them, though Israel had sworn to preserve them alive. Yahweh, seeing that Saul's crime was not likely to be punished or that the blood of the slain Gibeonites was not otherwise to be avenged, sent a famine upon the land of Israel for three long years, thus visiting the crime of Saul upon the defenseless and innocent people as a whole. What a drastic vengeance! David thereupon "sought the face of Yahweh" and learned that it was "for Saul and for his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonites." Upon taking up the matter with the Gibeonites themselves, David is given to understand that nothing less than the death of some of Saul's descendants will satisfy the demands of Gibeon. Accord-

ingly, he hands over to the Gibeonites two of the sons and five of the grandsons of Saul. These are hung up under the broad sky and the hot Syrian sun, and Rizpah, heart-broken mother, is left guarding her dead from the ravenous birds and beasts of prey. "And after that God was entreated for the land." What barbarous theology!

An altogether similar conception of God appears in the narrative regarding the census taken by David (II Sam., chap. 24). Yahweh was angry against Israel, the occasion of the wrath not being given. Therefore he "moved David" to number Israel. After David had carried out this divine impulse, he was stirred by remorse, realizing that the thing he had done was wrong. This wrong must be expiated. Therefore the word of Yahweh comes through the prophet Gad offering David a choice of three punishments. These punishments are all such as involve the suffering of the people as a whole. David chooses a three days' pestilence. Before

the plague has run its full course, the prophet orders David to build an altar on the floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and there sacrifice to Yahweh. David does as instructed and once more "Yahweh was entreated for the land and the plague was stayed from Israel."

Another side of David's conception of God is seen in the fact that whenever he is in doubt as to the wise and right course of procedure he seeks an oracle from Yahweh. But an "oracle from Yahweh" is nothing more nor less than the casting of lots. It is as though the modern man were to lay his difficulty before God and were then to step out from under all responsibility for the decision by flipping a coin. No seriously minded and genuinely religious man would dream of such procedure today. That the usual procedure did involve placing alternatives before Yahweh and taking his decision between them is clear from such records as I Sam. 14:18 f., 36–42; 23:4, 5, 9–13; II Sam. 2:1; 5:19, 22–24. In keeping with this naïve idea

of God is the fact that David's wife Michal kept a teraphim in the house. When Saul sent men to David's home to seize him, Michal saved her husband's life by letting him down through a window. She then gained time for him to make his escape by placing a teraphim in his bed and leading the unsuspecting emissaries to suppose that they were looking at David lying sick abed. With this report they returned to their master (I Sam. 19:12 ff.). The teraphim was an object of worship and from this narrative it is quite apparent that it was an image in human form. The identity of the image we do not know; but whether an image of Yahweh or of some other god than Yahweh, the outcome is in neither case in keeping with a high idea of God in David's home.

We need consider only one more side of David's God-idea. This is presented to our view in an incident recorded in I Sam., chap. 26. David was being chased by Saul from pillar to post. One night after a

careful reconnoitre he and Abishai visited Saul's camp while he and his guard were sleeping and carried away Saul's spear and water jar. The next morning from a neighboring hillside and at a safe distance David taunted Saul's guards with their negligence. Saul heard David's voice and took up the conversation with him. After disclaiming any evil intent toward Saul, David continues:

> If it be Yahweh that has stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering; but if it be the children of men cursed be they before Yahweh; for they have driven me out this day that I should not cleave unto the inheritance of Yahweh, saying: "Go, serve other gods." Now, therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of Yahweh; etc.

It is quite conceivable in David's mind that all his present trouble and danger at Saul's hand may be directly due to Yahweh's inspiration. If such should be the case, it is unreasonable that Yahweh should not be willing to square accounts upon the receipt of the proper offering. If, however, it be not Yahweh, but men

who have instigated Saul, curses be upon them from Yahweh. That is, Yahweh may curse men for doing what he might conceivably have done himself with perfect propriety. But whoever may be at the bottom of David's trouble, the result is the same; he is being driven out from Yahweh's land into a strange land wherein he will be under the sway of other gods and where he will die "away from the presence of Yahweh." David's God then is restrained within certain geographical boundaries. That is to say, David shares the ideas about Deity that were current in his day. For that age and in that part of the world, there were as many gods as there were peoples. Each god looked after his own people. Each people worshiped its own god and freely acknowledged the right of other peoples to exercise the same privilege for themselves. One god was as real as another; but each was limited to his own land and people. A good illustration of this is furnished in Judges, chapter 11. Jephthah is there represented

as engaged in diplomatic correspondence with the king of the Ammonites, the purpose of the negotiations being to persuade Ammon to leave Israel in peaceful possession of territory held since the days of the first entry and conquest. In this correspondence Jephthah says:

> Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his border, but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz and fought against Israel. And Yahweh, the God of Israel, delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. And they possessed all the border of the Amorites from the Arnon even unto the Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto the Jordan. So now Yahweh, the God of Israel, has dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel and shouldest thou possess them? Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever Yahweh our God has dispossessed from before us, them will we possess.

It is at once evident that this is not monotheism, but a full-fledged polytheism. *Quot gentes tot dei.* A parallel case is furnished by II Kings 17:25. The Assyri-

ans captured Samaria and deported its population in part. To take the places vacated by the exiles, the Assyrian king sent in people from "Babylon, Cuthah, Avvah, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and placed them in the cities of Samaria. . . . . And so it was that at the beginning of their dwelling there, they feared not Yahweh; therefore Yahweh sent lions among them which killed some of them. Wherefore they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, 'The nations which thou hast carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria know not the manner of the God of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them, and behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land.'" Thereupon one of the captive Hebrew priests was sent back home to teach the newcomers "the manner of the God of the land" and we are left to infer that the lions were thereby reduced to gentleness. Of similar character is the idea of God reflected in II Sam. 15:7 ff. Absalom is plotting to overthrow his

father David. But he cannot carry out his nefarious plot in Jerusalem right under David's nose. So he invents an excuse for leaving town. It runs as follows: Absalom said to the King, "I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow which I have vowed to Yahweh in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If Yahweh will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve Yahweh.'" Why not serve Yahweh in Jerusalem? Because the Yahweh of Jerusalem was not the Yahweh of Hebron. Somewhat as the Baal was localized at different shrines and dissolved into a multiplicity of Baals, or to descend to modern times, even as the power of God is thought of as manifesting itself at different sacred spots or in connection with various relics, so Yahweh was evidently localized at different shrines and the local Yahwehs were more or less independent one of another. A payment to Yahweh at Jerusalem would not satisfy the obligation to Yahweh at Hebron. Could

a man holding such views of God as these have written such psalms as those which carry David's name? Put alongside of David's fear of being driven "away from the presence of Yahweh" the language of Psalm 139:

Whither shall I go from Thy spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?
If I ascend to the heavens, Thou art there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold Thou art there.
If I should take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there would Thy hand lead me,
And Thy right hand would hold me.
Or if I say: "Surely the darkness will cover me,"
Then the night becomes light about me.
Even the darkness is not too dark for Thee;
But the night shineth as the day;
The darkness is the same as the light.

This kind of incompatibility lies not merely in the realm of the emotions or sensibilities, but is involved in the strictly intellectual or rational processes of the mind. We could as easily think of a man who had not gone beyond the multiplication tables in his mathematical training as writing treatises on integral calculus or

differential equations as to imagine the David of the Books of Samuel writing the seventy-three psalms assigned to him by tradition. Nor could they have been written in their present form for centuries after David's day. For David was a typical man of his age and fairly represents the theological and religious thought of his day.

To arrive at the foregoing conclusion is not the same as to say either that David wrote no psalms or that there are none of his psalms in the Psalter. Since David was as we have recognized both a poet and a deeply religious man, and since a tradition of psalm writing has attached itself to his name, the probability is that he actually did write some religious songs. It would be strange if he had not done so. And it may indeed be that some of his psalms are actually in the Psalter. But if so, they have undergone so great a metamorphosis that David himself would have great difficulty in identifying his literary offspring. This is due to the fact brought

out in our first chapter. The necessity of keeping a national hymn book in close touch with the developing thought of the people would work radical changes in the content and spirit of David's songs as they came down through the centuries. The crude thinking of the historical David would jar upon the finer feelings of his descendants whose minds had been clarified by the observation of centuries of history and whose lives had been moralized by the work of the great prophets. Hence it is little more than a waste of time to attempt to discover the original Davidic elements in the Psalter. Time and effort are spent to far greater advantage in the effort to understand and appreciate at their full value the Psalms as they have come to us. The really important question after all, is not, Who wrote the Psalms? but, What are the meaning and value of the Psalms themselves? Truth and value are not dependent upon questions of origin, but upon the degree of success with which the Psalms have functioned in the religious

experience of the past and will continue to function in the experience of coming generations. On the latter score the Psalms have nothing to fear if they are but rightly read and understood. They are their own best witness.

III

SUFFERING AND SONG

The fact of human suffering, with the problems arising therefrom, has challenged the best thought of the race from time immemorial. It has called forth the finest products in the world's literature. Sorrow is the theme of the great tragedies that grip our souls. Comedy has its place, but upon a lower level. *Paradise Lost* is the outstanding poem of English speech. The Book of Job has been called the world's greatest book, and its sole concern is with the problem of suffering. This is the perennial and paramount problem. All others shrink into insignificance before it. It ennobles whatever it touches and lifts the soul of man to its loftiest heights.

What is true of literature in general, is especially true of the Old Testament. It is the literature of suffering that takes the leading place in the Hebrew

Scriptures—the Book of Job, the servant passages in Isaiah (chapters 40–55) and the Book of Psalms are the three great outstanding Hebrew discussions of the problem of suffering. It is with the last of these three that we are here concerned.

We might well say that suffering is the central theme of the Psalter—of the 150 psalms of which it is composed, about 90 concern themselves more or less directly with some aspect of this problem. Indeed the first Psalm, which may properly be thought of as the preface to the Psalter, strikes the keynote of the whole book and states the view of suffering that prevails throughout.

This interest in and emphasis upon the thought of suffering is but a reflection of the experience of the times in which most of the psalms were written. The Psalter was the hymn book of postexilic Judaism; and as such it must perforce enter into the thoughts and problems of the people whose religious needs it sought to express and to satisfy. But for that period the outstand-

ing problem was that forced upon their minds by their repeated misfortunes. In 597 B.C. had occurred the first great deportation of Jews to Babylon. This was followed by another one in 586, at which time the temple was destroyed and the Jewish state brought to an end. The discouragement and longing of Judaism are feelingly expressed in Psalm 137:

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept,
When we remembered Zion.
Upon the willows in the midst thereof
We hanged up our harps.
For there they that lead us captive asked of us
words of song,
And our tormentors asked of us mirth—
"Sing us one of the Songs of Zion."

How can we sing Yahweh's song
In a foreign land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning;
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
If I remember thee not,
If I set not Jerusalem
Above my chiefest joy.

With the appearance of Cyrus upon the political horizon, alert spirits among the

exiles began to encourage their people with hopes of deliverance and return. Among these the writer of Isaiah, chapters 40–55, takes the leading place. He looks forward to the final victory of Cyrus as ushering in the golden age. He paints glowing pictures of the glory of redeemed Israel. By every possible device of oratory and poetry, he strives to kindle in the hearts of his contemporaries the same faith and hope that burn so brightly in his own bosom. At last the great anticipated day arrives. Small companies of enthusiasts take up the return to Jerusalem. It is a day of great expectations. But the event did not come up to the anticipations. The ruined temple did not rise phoenix-like from its ashes. The demolished walls staid flat upon the ground in spite of faith and prayer. The handful of returning pilgrims found itself insignificant and poverty stricken. The hard labors of the farmer in the fields yielded small returns to meet the high cost of living. This state of affairs is clearly

depicted in the words of Haggai speaking about 520, just a few years after the return had begun:

> Ye have sown much, and brought in little;
> Ye eat, but ye have not enough;
> Ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink;
> Ye clothe you, but there is none warm;
> And he that earneth wages earneth wages
> For a bag with holes.

High hopes and lofty aspirations gave place to indifference and materialism, discouragement and despair, doubt and gloom. Into such a situation came Haggai and Zechariah with a fresh call to idealism and high endeavor. "Build the temple, it is the word of Yahweh of hosts; and in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the choicest things of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory." Haggai and Zechariah were so confident of the correctness of their solution of Israel's problem that they did not hesitate to announce the coming of the messianic age

when the temple should be completed, and they even went so far as to identify Zerubbabel, the builder of the temple, with the long-hoped-for Messiah.[1] The messianic boom of Zerubbabel collapsed with a crash and buried the hope of Israel in its ruins.

Such experiences were all too frequent in later Judaism. The unquenchable patriotism and high hope of Jewry broke out in revolt against the tyranny of Artaxerxes Ochus (358–337 B.C.) and brought upon itself terrible reprisals. Alexander the Great destroyed the former tyrants, but wholly failed to satisfy the aspirations of Judaism. The armies of Syria and Egypt under the Seleucidae and the Ptolemies, rivals for world dominion, made the fields of Palestine their battleground, thus making the home of Israel a veritable no-man's land. Finally the madman Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.) played battledore and shuttlecock with the fortunes of Judah. Never

[1] Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:8; 4:7-9; 6:9-13.

did a people suffer worse things for their faith than the Jews of the Maccabean struggle.

The effect of this oft-repeated and long-continued disappointment and suffering upon the mind of the faithful is evident from such a passage as Isa. 26:17–18:

Like as a woman with child that draweth near the
time of her delivery
Is in pain and crieth out in her pangs,
So have we been at Thy presence, O Yahweh;
We have been with child, we have been in pain,
We have as it were brought forth wind;
We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth;
Neither are the inhabitants of the world come to life.

Others were driven further in their disappointment and stood ready to repudiate the righteousness of God. Witness Mal. 2:17:

You have wearied Yahweh with your words,
Yet you say "Wherein have we wearied him?"
In that you are saying "Every one that doeth evil
Is good in the sight of Yahweh,
And he delights in them"—
Or, "Where is the God of Justice?"

Against such a background the Psalter is to be interpreted. Amid such cross-

currents of hope and despair, of doubt and faith, it came into being and it found acceptance. We might almost call it a Manual for Mourners. Naturally then the idea of suffering and the fact of sorrow occupy a central place in its pages. The writers and users of the Psalter lived in a world that had inherited a theory of suffering. The prophets had formulated that theory with unmistakable clearness and authority. It had become the orthodox doctrine of the day upon the subject of suffering. Isaiah had formulated it thus:

> If you be willing and obedient,
> You shall eat the good of the land;
> But if you refuse and rebel,
> You shall be devoured with the sword.

Stated in commonplace terms, this teaching is that prosperity is the reward of piety and adversity is the punishment of sin. Good people will always prosper; bad people will fall prey to trouble, misfortune, and death.

This altogether too simple solution of the problem of life had already aroused

question. The experiences of everyday life and the facts of common observation had thrown doubt upon its validity. Habakkuk had dared to challenge the Almighty to show cause why in the light of Hebrew history he should not be charged with maladministration of the moral universe. The author of Isaiah, chapters 40–55, had worked out in the Servant Songs a new theory, viz., that the sufferings of Israel were of vicarious significance and function and were to work out for the benefit of the world at large. But more than all, the Book of Job had attacked the problem of suffering boldly and frankly and had smashed the traditional dogma beyond all possibility of restoration to its original form. But there is nothing so hard to kill as dogmas; they have a way of living long after they are dead. That is the situation with the doctrine of suffering in the Psalter. The old orthodox theory still reigns supreme. It greets us upon the first page of the Psalter in full vigor:

O, the happiness of the man who has not walked
in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stood in the way of sinners,
Nor sat in the seat of the scornful;
Whose delight is in the law of Yahweh,
And in His law doth he meditate day and night.
Such an one is like a tree planted by streams of
water,
That yieldeth its fruit in its season,
And its leaf does not wither;
Yea, everything that he does prospers.
Not so the wicked!
On the contrary, they are like chaff which the
wind drives away;
Therefore the wicked do not stand in the judg-
ment,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous—
For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked shall perish.

In similar strain does the poet of Psalm 128 sing:

Happy is everyone that fears Yahweh,
That walks in His ways.
When thou eatest the labor of thy hands,
Happy art thou and it is well with thee;
Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine in the inmost
circles of thy house,
Thy children like olive plants around thy table.
Lo, thus indeed will the man be blessed,
That fears Yahweh.

This orthodoxy is scarcely questioned in the Psalter. The legitimate function of doubt, inquiry, and investigation finds no recognition. This is, of course, natural, in view of the purpose and function of the Psalter in Judaism. We do not hymn our doubts and our problems in the great congregation. We come together to strengthen one another by our common enthusiasms and loyalties, not to disturb and weaken by adding new troubles to those already possessed. The Psalter was the Jewish hymn book, not a treatise upon systematic theology nor a handbook of ethics.

Let us then turn to a survey of the reactions upon suffering on the part of the orthodox and pious saints in Jewry who found the religion of the Psalter adequate to their intellectual and spiritual needs. What attitudes toward the personal and community disappointments, wrongs, and tragedies are to be found in the Psalms? Under the shadow of the accepted theory that suffering always means punishment for sin, whether conscious or unconscious,

we should expect to find some psalms expressive of a spirit of repentance. We are suffering; therefore we have sinned; hence it behooves us to repent that the suffering may give place to joy. Such psalms do appear; the most familiar one probably is the 51st wherein some stricken soul pours forth its sense of guilt and its cry for cleansing and pardon.

> Be gracious unto me, O God, in accordance
> with thy mercy;
> In accordance with the multitude of
> Thy compassions blot out my transgressions.
> Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,
> And cleanse me from my sin,
> For I know my transgressions,
> And my sin is ever before me.
> . . . . . .
> Purge me with hyssop that I may be clean,
> Wash me that I may be whiter than snow.
> . . . . . .
> Hide thy face from my sin,
> And blot out all mine iniquities;
> Create in me a clean heart, O God,
> And renew a right spirit within me.
> Cast me not away from Thy presence;
> And take not Thy holy spirit from me.

Similar sentiments appear in Psalms 31 and 32 and elsewhere; but there is rela-

tively slight emphasis in the Psalter upon penitence or upon the necessity of repentance. There is much more expression of the feeling of discouragement. And what more natural under the circumstances? The Psalter was the hymn book of the Jewish community. It voiced the hopes and sorrows of the people as a whole to quite as great an extent, at least, as it gave utterance to the ideals of individuals. And what ground was there for encouragement in the greater part of the period during which the Psalter grew up and came into general use? It is a baffled and downcast patriotism that speaks in such lines as these from Psalm 60:

O God, thou hast cast us off! Thou hast broken
us down;
Thou hast been angry; O restore us.
Thou hast made the land to shake,
Thou hast cleft it.
Heal the breaches thereof, for it is tottering.
Thou hast made Thy people to see hard things,
Thou hast made us to drink the wine of staggering.
. . . . . .
O that He would bring me into the fortified city,
That He would lead me into Edom.
Hast not Thou, O God, cast us off?
And Thou goest not forth with our hosts.

Conscious of the integrity of himself and his people and resentful of malicious charges not rightfully incurred, another poet in Psalm 69 thus pictures the Jewish state of mind:

Save me, O God;
For the waters are come in even unto the soul;
I am sunk in deep mire, where there is no foothold;
I am come into deep waters, and the flood overwhelms me.
I am weary of crying, my throat is parched,
Mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God.
They that hate me without cause are more than the hairs of my head;
They that would cut me off, being my enemies wrongfully, are many.
Should I restore that which I did not steal?
. . . . . .
Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach,
Confusion has covered my face.
I am become a stranger unto my brethren,
And an alien unto my mother's children,
Because zeal for Thy house has eaten me up,
And the reproaches of them that reproach Thee are fallen upon me.
And I wept with my soul fasting,
And that became unto me a reproach.
I made sackcloth also my garment,
And I became a byword unto them.
They that sit in the gate talk of me;
And I am the song of the drunkards.

But the masterpiece among these elegies is that which was lifted into imperishable glory as the vehicle for the cry of the broken heart of the Man upon the Cross—as the sorrowing, almost despairing, lament of a weary and worn people it has never been surpassed (Psalm 22):

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
Far from my Helper are the words of groaning.
My God, I cry in the day time and Thou dost
not answer,
And in the night there is no surcease for me.
Yet Thou art holy,
O Thou that dwellest in the praises of Israel;
In Thee our fathers trusted;
They trusted and Thou didst rescue them;
Unto Thee they cried and were delivered;
In Thee they trusted and were not ashamed.
But I am a worm and not a man;
A reproach of mankind and despised of people;
All who see me laugh me to scorn;
They open wide their mouths, they wag the head:
"Let him commit himself unto Yahweh! Let
Him rescue him;
Let Him deliver him, seeing He delights in him."

Let it not be supposed, however, that the blasted hopes of Judaism expended themselves merely in confession and lamen-

tation. There was too much virility in the Jewish soul to permit of such unmitigated weakness. Consequently this aspect of their disappointment was supplemented by a vigorous outpouring of wrath against those who had been the agents of their calamity. This spirit is given strong utterance in many psalms, of which the best (or shall I say the worst?) examples are the 55th, 69th, 83d, 109th, and 137th. These are commonly known as the Imprecatory Psalms. A few stanzas will call them sharply to our memories:

Thou knowest my reproach,
And my shame is before all my oppressors;
Reproach has broken my heart,
And incurable is the hurt of my soul.
And I looked for a comforter, and there was none,
And for consolers, and I found none.
But they put poison in my food,
And made me drink vinegar for my thirst.
Let their table become a snare before them,
And a trap to them when unsuspecting;
Let their eyes be darkened that they may not see,
And make their loins tremble continually.
Pour out Thy fury upon them,
And may Thy hot anger overtake them.
Let their camp be devastated,

And may there be none dwelling in their tents;
For they harass him whom Thou hast smitten,
And unto the misery of those whom Thou hast
wounded they add.
Add guilt unto their guilt,
And let them not enter into Thy vindication;
May they be blotted out of the book of life,
And not be written among the righteous.
[Ps. 69:20–29].

Lest that be not savage enough, let us add one more passage:

They have laid upon me evil for good,
And hatred for my love.
Set Thou a wicked man against him,
And let an adversary stand at his right hand.
When he goes to Court, let him come forth guilty,
And may his very prayer itself become a sin.
May his days be few,
And let another take his office;
May his children be fatherless,
And his wife a widow;
May his children be vagabonds and beg,
And be ejected from their ruins;
May the creditor levy upon all that he has,
And may strangers plunder his hard earnings.
May there be none to shew him pity,
Nor any shewing favor to his fatherless children.
May his posterity be cut off,
And his name wiped out in one generation;
May the guilt of his fathers be brought to Yahweh's
remembrance,

And the sin of his mother not be wiped out.
Let them be before Yahweh continually,
That He may cut off memory of them from the earth. [Ps. 109:6–17].

As we read these and similar passages in cold blood, they shock our finer sentiments. We shrink from such inhumanity. For those holding the traditional conception of Scripture these Imprecatory Psalms constitute an almost insurmountable problem, a *crux interpretum*. But to the modern student such psalms are quite intelligible and not wholly inexcusable. The Hebrew poets of religion were after all men, and very human men at that. Inspired men? Yes, certainly; but none the less, yea, all the more on that account, men. Inspiration does not dehumanize; rather it raises humanity to its highest power. This case is no exception to the foregoing general principle. Anger is a genuinely human characteristic, with legitimate as well as illegitimate functions. The admirable thing about the wrath of the Imprecatory Psalms is that it is in

the main right; perhaps, we might almost say, from the point of view of the times in which they were written, wholly right. The wonder is that Jewry, not only in those days but down through all its history, has so consistently confined its savagery to literary expression, and with rare exceptions has not sought to give it realistic outlet even when full opportunity for such vengeance lay to hand.

Let us not forget then that the psalmists were men, and that the wrong and brutality of the treatment Judaism had to undergo at the hands of her conquerors and persecutors tried their humanity to the utmost. We have had in our own day closely analogous situations thrust upon our attention. The German treatment of the Belgian, French, and Serbian "occupied territory" with its population, and the Turco-German treatment of the Armenians are too well known to need elaboration. Are we to suppose that under the administration of such inhuman and bestial conquerors, the Belgians, French, Armenians,

and Serbians went about repeating, for their own edification and that of their murderers, the beautiful words of the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians? That was no time for meditations upon brotherly love. All through that period the *lex talionis* was upon the statute books of Israel. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was the law of man and of God. The Christian ideal, "Love thine enemy," was not yet born.

Further, the orthodoxy of the day was threatened; and do we not too well know the wrath of an imperiled orthodoxy? The righteous nation *should* prosper and the wicked *should* come to grief. But the situation as an actual fact was the exact reverse of this during the greater part of the exilic and postexilic history. The wonder is that Jewish orthodoxy defied the facts of experience so obstinately and so long. A drastic punishment of the wicked foes of Israel was the imperative demand of the situation as interpreted by the great masses of the saints.

But such punishment was also the demand of justice as well as of orthodoxy. We must bear in mind that the favor of God was by the Jew conceived of not along exclusively and highly spiritual lines, but rather in a very substantial and materialistic way. The people of God must prosper economically and politically; all who wrong them must be overthrown, destroyed like Nineveh and Babylon. Only so could the moral order of the Universe be conserved. The character of God was at stake. There were not wanting those, as we have seen, who were already charging him with indifference, yea, with impotence—God must show himself God if he would hold the hearts of his people. Thus it appears that the whole fabric of Jewish religion was bound up with this hope of retribution upon the tyrannical nations. Consequently we need not wonder that the words of Jewish poets upon this subject were intense and burning. This is still more explicable when we recall that there

was no widespread or vital hope of a worthful life hereafter among the Jews. The rewards and punishments of God must be distributed in the world that now is. The Jews did not comfort themselves in present sufferings by anticipations of future compensating glory. It remained for later Jewish thought to conceive of Dives and Lazarus. But when the problem of rewards and punishments is conceived of in materialistic terms and is limited to the present life, it becomes correspondingly urgent and gives rise to passionate hopes and desires. Then, too, we cannot overlook the fact that the Jewish anger against their oppressors and tormentors was but the reverse side and the measure of their passion for justice. We do our civilization small credit if we can sit by unmoved at the spectacle of oppression and violence whether at the expense of ourselves or of others. Our sense of right will inevitably react violently and effectively against injustice in proportion as it is well informed and rightly energized.

To gaze upon ruthless wrong with unruffled spirit is the sign of a degenerate. It would ill become us in the light of our recent experiences to fail to appreciate profoundly the ideals and convictions of the men who wrote and sang the Imprecatory Psalms.

In treating the attitude of the psalmists toward suffering, we cannot stop before briefly noting the consolations that sustained them in the midst of trying times and the compensations of spirit that came to them as a direct contribution from their hard experience. The outstanding movement in postexilic thought was messianism. This was the community's eschatology of hope. Israel might be suffering now, to be sure, but the day is near at hand when she will see herself righted before the world and her foes humiliated in defeat and subjection. This period is to be inaugurated by the enthronement of a Messiah in Judah and from his throne in Jerusalem he will rule the world. The history of Judaism is the story of the rise and fall of one messianic hope after

another. Through this hope the community triumphed over doubt and defeat. Each new calamity was heralded as the last. It was the final preparation for the coming of the Great Day, whose clouds and darkness would roll away, revealing to the waiting world the splendid brilliance of the messianic dawn.

The Psalter as the hymn book of the exilic community could not escape the influence of this undying hope. It sings in the psalms, sometimes in plaintive strains, sometimes in the terrible diapason of wrath, and sometimes in an exultant chorus of exuberant joy; in one form or another it bursts forth on every page like a fountain of pure water from the well spring of life. Again and again this hope assumes the form of fervent appeals to Yahweh to reveal himself in punitive wrath against the oppressors of his people. The great 90th Psalm cannot close without a cry to Yahweh for relief:

> Return, O Yahweh, how long?
> And let it repent Thee concerning thy servants.

O satisfy us in the morning with thy mercy,
That we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
Make us glad according to the days wherein
Thou hast afflicted us,
In proportion to the years wherein we have seen
evil.
Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants,
And Thy glory unto their children.
And let the favour of Yahweh, our God, be
upon us,
And upon the work of our hands [Ps. 90:14–18].

In more strident tones many psalms call for judgment upon the wicked nations. For example, the Imprecatory Psalms which we have already considered and several like them breathe out prayers for fire and sword upon the wicked:

O my God, make them like the whirling dust,
Like stubble before the wind.
As the fire that burns the forest,
And as the flame that sets the mountains ablaze,
So pursue them with Thy tempest,
And affright them with Thy storm.
Fill their faces with shame,
That they may seek Thy name, O Yahweh.
Let them be ashamed and affrighted forever;
Yea, let them be confounded and perish;
That they may know that it is only Thou
Who are most high over all the earth
[Ps. 83:17–19; cf. 35:19–28].

This cry for vengeance and vindication often passes over into jubilation over a judgment already come to pass. For instance, Ps. 96:10–13:

Say among the nations: "Yahweh reigneth,
The world also is established, it cannot be moved;
Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult;
Let the sea roar and its fulness;
Let the field rejoice and all that is therein;
Then let all the trees of the forest sing for joy
Before Yahweh, for he has come to judge the earth."

Such anticipation of a future event, and treatment of a hope as an existing fact, is a common feature of Hebrew prophetic thought, and illustrates how vivid and compelling the expectations of Judaism were.

The most definitely messianic of the psalms is the second. Its importance is indicated by the fact that it has been placed by the editors of the Psalter at the very threshold of the community's hymnal. It is an explicit recognition and indorsement of the messianic hope:

Yahweh said unto me: "Thou art my son;
This day have I begotten thee.

Ask of Me, and I will give thee the nations for
thine inheritance,
And the ends of the earth for thy possession.
Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron,
Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's
vessel."
Now, therefore, be wise, O ye Kings,
Be instructed ye judges of the earth,
Serve Yahweh in fear,
And rejoice tremblingly.
Kiss the Son lest He be angry and ye perish in
the way,
For His wrath is quickly kindled.

We shall, of course, recognize that the messianic hope could not be expressed too definitely and concretely in a songbook intended for public use. The necessity of outward respect for the ruling power of the day would prevent too explicit exposition of the content and program of the great hope. The wonder, indeed, is that the civil and military authorities permitted to go unchallenged as much as they did in the way of threats of vengeance upon and prayers for the destruction of the oppressors of Israel.

Such hopes as these evince the persistence of an invincible and unshakable

faith among the later Jews. A hope expressing itself in one form was no sooner dashed to the ground than it sprang up again in another form. These poets and dreamers were so sure of God and of his love for Israel that they could not lose hope. The bludgeonings of circumstance did but make them cling more closely to their God. He could not fail them nor forsake them. Had he not rescued the forefathers time and again when all seemed lost? Would he not do as much for his people today? Could he, indeed, afford to do otherwise? For the sake of his own name—his reputation among the nations—he must intervene and save his people from ruin. Nothing apparently could wrench these men of faith from their allegiance to their fathers' God. It is the marvel of history. Nothing like it on a national scale can be found elsewhere. It is the revelation of a loyalty that passeth all understanding. The great and repeated disasters that befel Judah were treated by these heroes of faith not as

stumbling-blocks but as stepping-stones. They climbed upward upon them to a profounder trust in God and a truer understanding of him. With God all things are possible:

> God is our refuge and strength,
> A very present help in trouble.
> Therefore will we not fear though the earth do move,
> And though the mountains be moved into the heart of the seas.
> Though the waters thereof roar and foam,
> Though the mountains quake at the swelling thereof [Ps. 46:2–4].

Along with this national hope and faith, and developing within it, there grew up a more spiritual type of religion. The religion of Israel never lost its patriotic quality. The religious hope of Judaism was always and everywhere, both in and out of the Psalter, largely concerned about the glorification of Israel in the eyes of the world. The faithful looked for a Kingdom of God on earth which should bring all human kingdoms into subjection to itself. But these hopes were always deferred, and always renewed in brighter

and more glowing colors. Yet in spite of this, and indeed by reason of this long continued disappointment, the religious life of Judaism became more truly spiritual. It is notable that the great ethical and religious contribution of the Semitic group to the welfare of the race was made not by the mighty and prosperous kingdoms of Babylonia, Assyria, or Egypt, whose gods were overwhelmed with sacrifices of thanksgiving for their abundant gifts, but by the disappointed, weak, and poverty-stricken Hebrew who was stripped of all that he owned and became ultimately a homeless wanderer upon the face of the earth. Deprived of material goods he sought the more earnestly after spiritual blessings. Being forced to dispense with the substantial goods that most men treasured highest, he discovered that these things *could* be dispensed with, and that life could go on and become more truly rich notwithstanding. A successful and prosperous Israel would probably have left an impoverished world; but even as

Israel suffered at the hands of the world, did she, in turn, pour into the world's treasury the rich products of her increasingly spiritual experience. Failing of outer glory, she shone supreme in the glory of the spirit. Given no recognition by man, she sought and attained communion with God. She came to see for herself and to proclaim to the world about her that fellowship with God was the highest good, that having him she could dispense with all else.

This loftiest height to which the soul of the Psalmist attained is by some strange chance preserved for our inspiration in a psalm that is found, not in the Psalter, but at the end of the book of Habakkuk. It is both by outer form and by inner spirit incontestably proved to be a psalm in as full and complete a sense as any psalm within the limits of the present Psalter.[1] This psalm is an apocalyptic

[1] This Psalm was originally no part of the message of Habakkuk, the prophet, but was placed with it by some later editor who saw how splendidly it supplemented the teaching of the prophet. See the commentaries on Habakkuk by Sir George Adam Smith and S. R. Driver.

picture of the coming of Yahweh to judge the nations of the earth. But it is as though the Psalmist had checked himself at the close of verse 16 and recalled that other men had frequently painted such pictures and had looked forward eagerly for their realization in actual history, but had met with heartbreaking disillusionment. With this possibility in mind for his own case, he goes on in the following splendid strain:

> Though the fig-tree do not flourish,
> And there be no fruit on the vines;
> Though the yield of the olive fail,
> And the fields produce no food;
> Though the flock be cut off from the fold,
> And there be no ox in the stalls;
> Yet in Yahweh I will exult,
> I will rejoice in the God of my deliverance.

This is a recognition of the fact that religion is its own reward. It is an expression of the conviction that God is his own best gift. In such words as those which occur and recur throughout the Psalter, there shines forth the truth that inner joy is independent of outer fortune,

that the gifts of God are the eternal possession of the soul.

To such heights of spiritual aspiration were the saints of Judaism spurred on by the untoward circumstances of their earthly life. Such abiding satisfaction did they find in meditation upon and communion with God. Their thought of God was in many respects naïve and inadequate for our lives. But their appreciation of God and their unswerving devotion to him through thick and thin, constitute a continual challenge to us who have fallen upon better days and who have an idea of God in many respects immeasurably superior to theirs. If they could sing such noble sentiments in the midst of constant affliction, it ill becomes us to be downcast when surrounded by material wealth and power. Their strength was in the realm of the spirit. We, too, if true to our spiritual inheritance, will prize the things that are priceless and find our abiding satisfactions in those things which the world can neither give nor take away.

IV

THE PSALMS AND IMMORTALITY

We ask ourselves here what answer did the psalmists give to the eternal question, "If a man die, does he live?" What place did the thought of life after death hold in the minds of the writers of the Psalms? To what extent were their buoyant faith and invincible hope based upon a conviction that the wrongs of the present life would be righted in the future life? The Psalter represents the best aspiration, the purest idealism of the saintly in Judaism who held to the traditional interpretations of life and walked in the old paths without serious deviation therefrom. The attitude of such men toward the question of life after death is unquestionably of interest to students of the history of religion.

In order to get ourselves correctly oriented in our approach to this question, we must take a brief survey of the state of

thought in Israel upon this subject prior to the production of the Psalms. The earliest Hebrew view on record regarded man as constituted of "flesh" and "spirit." At death man "gave up the ghost," i.e., the spirit. The spirit now persisted apart from the body in a bodiless state. This conception of death is represented clearly in two instances. Some length of time after Samuel's death, the witch of Endor is said to have called up the spirit of Samuel at Saul's behest (I Sam. 28:7–20). When Elijah restored the widow's son to life it is said that "the soul of the child came back into him and he revived" (I Kings 17:17–24). Belief in the possibility and actual occurrence of resurrection from death is also attested by the story of Elisha raising the farmer's son after he had been dead for a day or two (II Kings 4:18–37), and by the tale of the coming to life again of a man whose body was unceremoniously dumped into Elisha's tomb. Contact with the sacred bones of the prophet overcame the effects of death

and the man sprang to his feet (II Kings 13:20 f.).

From these and other facts it is certain that the ancient Hebrews, as a matter of course, believed in the persistence of personality after death. However, it is equally clear that they had not yet arrived at any thought of discrimination between the good and the bad in the hereafter. There were no ethical distinctions among the shades. Nor is there any evidence that there was any thought of the life after death as being desirable or worth while. Death is never looked upon as any other than a calamity; it is never viewed as opening a door of hope. Furthermore, it is practically certain that persistence of personality after death had not yet acquired the philosophical dignity of being regarded as eternal life. Nobody had yet reached so advanced a philosophical conception as that of eternity. The Hebrew word (*'ôlâm*), sometimes translated by "eternity," or in adverbial phrases "forever," is by no means to be

given the idea of endless duration. Not infrequently it is applied to the lifetime of a man (e.g., Exod. 21:6; I Sam. 1:22) or other limited periods. All that persistence meant for that period of thought was that as long as there was anybody living who remembered the departed personality that person was thought of as still alive. On the other hand there was no thought that ordinary men could by any means escape this persistence after death. Extraordinary individuals, like Enoch and Elijah, might escape death itself by being transported to the heavens; but the common man must go the way of all flesh and share the common lot. Annihilation of personality never entered the ancient Hebrew mind. That, too, was too abstract and philosophical a conception for early Hebrew thought.

During the period of the great Hebrew prophets, this early attitude toward and conception of life after death continued without essential change. This is shown by a few statements coming from this

period with reference to necromancy. The prophets testify to its existence by their denunciations of it. For example, Isa. 8:19 f.:

> When they say unto you "Seek unto the ghosts and the familiar spirits, that chirp and moan; should not a people seek unto its gods, on behalf of the living unto the dead, for instruction and testimony?" —surely they speak after this fashion in which there is no light."

Here the popular recourse to spiritualism is the cause of the prophet's expostulation. What he said about it then is equally true of it today.

The great prophets of Israel's classical period made no contribution to the thought of life after death. They almost completely ignored the subject. The explanation of this silence is not far to seek. The interest of these prophets was not in the welfare of the individual, but in that of the state. They were ministers unto the national life, their concern for individuals was altogether a secondary matter, and that, too, only in so far as the conduct of individuals was conceived of as affecting

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the welfare of the state. During the prophetic period the existence of the state was constantly in jeopardy, and the whole energy of the prophets was directed toward its conservation and deliverance. During the recent world-war we saw something of the same sort taking place in our more influential pulpits. We heard more discussion of current world-issues from the pulpit during that five years than most of us had heard from that source in all our previous experience. So the prophets had neither time nor inclination for the discussion of personal problems, especially such as were not immediately pressing. All their hopes were centered in the welfare and future of the state. An interesting parallel is afforded by the case of Homer, with whom the thought of the future life of individuals drops out of sight, necromancy and its associations are ruthlessly derided, and emphasis is laid upon the group or national consciousness. In Israel, messianism displaced immortality and kept it in the background.

That the belief in the persistence of life beyond the grave continued all through the prophetic period in the consciousness of the common people is evident from Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (chap. 37). It has been customary to say that this is a vision of the national resurrection of Israel which is to follow the Exile, and that it says nothing as to the hope of the resurrection of individuals. This interpretation, however, overlooks an important fact. The purpose of the narration of the vision is, of course, to rekindle hope in the bosom of an almost despairing people. The prophet assures them that the after life of the apparently dead nation will be greater and grander than any stage of its history thus far has been. He predicts a resurrection of national life and power. He illustrates this by a parable or allegory in the form of a vision of dry bones being clothed upon with flesh and being infilled with the spirit of life. That is to say, the prophet uses the fact of the resurrection of indi-

viduals to illustrate his hope and conviction as to the resurrection of the national existence. No wise teacher, least of all Ezekiel, ever sought to make a difficult truth or unfamiliar idea clear by means of still more difficult or unfamiliar illustrative material. The true pedagogical method involves progress from the known to the unknown. It seeks to render the way to the unfamiliar easy and attractive by the use of analogies dealing with familiar objects and experiences. The prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel, are particularly apt in their use of such methods. Consequently, if Ezekiel uses the picture of a lot of dismembered skeletons coming to life again in response to the call of Yahweh for the purpose of making his prediction of national revivification seem more real to his auditors, it may be taken for granted that a belief in the resurrection of individuals was the common possession of Ezekiel's contemporaries. It has been urged against this conclusion with seeming force that in

verse 3, where Yahweh asks, "Can these bones live?" and the prophet answers, "O Yahweh God, Thou knowest," the answer indicated the prophet's disbelief in such a possibility. That is true, however, only to a certain degree. The prophet is naturally cautious and noncommittal under the circumstances. He knows, *ex hypothese*, that he is talking with Yahweh and that makes him careful in his reply. But on the other hand, it is to be considered that the prophet is confronted by an extraordinary proposition. He could easily, perhaps, believe in a far-off resurrection of the dead, even as many people do today, and believe in it intensely. But to be challenged to an immediate demonstration of its possibility on a large scale takes the wind out of him, even as it would out of us to be asked to go out to see the sleeping population of the neighboring cemetery rise from their tombs. Such a practical (or impracticable) test of our theory might well give us pause, though no one would be war-

ranted in charging us therefore with disbelief in the possibility of life after death, or even in the ultimate bodily resurrection of the dead.

We see then that the Hebrew belief in the persistence of personality did not perish during the prophetic period. We turn now to a piece of literature from the period following Ezekiel, viz., the Book of Job. This great book was of contemporary origin with many of the psalms. It will, therefore, give us insight into another current of thought running parallel to that of the psalmists. We shall of course keep in mind the fact that Job was the product of the school of the sages in Judaism, the nearest approach that Judaism made to the philosophers of Greece. We may then not be surprised if we are met here by a somewhat cool and dispassionate, if indeed not critical, attitude toward the state after death. The prevailing attitude in Job may be represented by two passages, viz., 10:18–22 and 14:7–22. In the former, Job expostulates with Yahweh as follows:

Wherefore then hast Thou brought me forth out
of the womb?
Would that I had perished and no eye had seen me!
I should have been as though I had not been;
I should have been carried from the womb to the
grave.
Are not my days few? Cease then,
And let me alone, that I may take comfort a
little,
Before I go whence I shall not return,
Even to the land of darkness and of deep shadow,
A land of gloom and disorder,
And the light is like darkness.

Manifestly, the lot of the soul after death is not an alluring one. In the second passage the outlook is, to say the least, no brighter. In verses 7–12 the poet, through the contrast afforded by the power of a tree to spring up into new life after having been once cut down, emphasizes the hopelessness of man's lot:

But man dieth and lieth low;
Yea, man perisheth, and where is he?
As the waters fail from the sea,
And the river is drained dry,
So man lieth down and riseth not;
Till the heavens be no more, they will
not awake,
Nor be roused out of their sleep.

But contemplation of such a fate is appalling to the writer and in revulsion from it he longs for an opportunity to meet his God after death.

> Oh, that thou wouldst hide me in Sheol,
> That thou wouldst keep me secret until
> thy wrath be past,
> That thou wouldst make an appointment
> with me and remember me.

But such a hope is no sooner expressed than its futility is recognized and he breaks out, "If a man die, is he alive?"

To ask that question is to answer it. The two terms death and life are mutually exclusive. "If a man is dead is he living?" Certainly not. But the longing for a chance after death is overwhelming and the sufferer goes on to describe his eagerness to respond to the divine call for a *post mortem* appointment. But once more he brushes aside such an impossibility and resumes his melancholy and hopeless strain. Even as the forces of nature irresistibly sweep everything before them,

> So Thou destroyest the hope of man,
> Thou prevailest forever against him and he passes;

Thou changest his countenance and sendest him
away.
His sons come to honour, but he knows it not;
And they are brought low, but he regards them
not.
But his flesh suffers for him,
And his soul mourns for him.

There is but one passage in the Book of Job that by any possibility can be made to reveal a hope of a worth-while existence after death, and that is the famous and familiar *crux interpretum* (19:25 f.). The text and meaning there, however, are so doubtful and ambiguous that it is useless to base any judgment upon these verses. On the whole it may be said that the attitude of Job elsewhere toward the question of life after death renders it very unlikely that he finally formulated a clear and definite hope and expressed it in only one passage. If he had come to such a brilliant and revolutionary change in his thinking he surely would have heralded it in unmistakable terms, especially as it would have had such a vital effect upon his interpretation of his own suffering.

But see S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *The Book of Job* (International Critical Commentary [1921]), on Job 19:25 f., where the position is taken that Job here thinks of himself as restored to consciousness for a little while after his death that he may with his own eyes see God vindicating his character before the world.

The view clearly present in Job that there is nothing to be hoped for in the after world is, of course, the old opinion still persisting, though somewhat more philosophically developed. This same old view finds clear expression also in the Psalter. Death and Sheol are things to be dreaded (Pss. 69:16; 30:4). In death none think of God or praise him (Pss. 6:5; 30:9; 115:17; 118:17; 119:175). God, in turn, in like manner takes no thought of the dead (Ps. 88:5–7, 10, 12 f.). Premature death is the punishment of the wicked (Pss. 9:18; 31:18; 37:22, 28–35, 38). "Thou, O God, wilt bring them down into Sheol. Men of blood shall not live out half their days" (Ps. 55:24). On the other hand

length of days is the reward of the righteous (Pss. 23:6; 91:16; 97:10; 103:5; 116:3, 15; 118:17). But finally all go down to Sheol. Death is no respecter of persons (Ps. 49:6–13).

> O remember how short my time is;
> For what vanity hast Thou created all the sons of men!
> What man is there that shall not see death?
> That shall deliver himself from the power of the grave? [Ps. 89:47 f.]

In general the view of the Psalter is that all, good and bad alike, go down to Sheol; that there is no moral discrimination in the life there; and that that life is hardly worthy of the name—it is a bare and futile existence robbed of all that makes life worth living. While this is true for the Psalter as a whole, it does not necessarily hold good of all the Psalms. For the Psalter is from many minds and may therefore reflect differing opinions upon such a subject as this. We now turn, therefore, to some passages that call for special attention.

First of all, we may dismiss with brief notice a passage that is misrepresented by the Authorized Version, viz.:

> Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell;
> Neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption [Ps. 16:10].

It is sufficient to observe that in the immediate context, both before and after, the psalmist is rejoicing in the thought of the divine protection that gives him security so that he is made to "know the path of life," i.e., is saved from death. Then when we scrutinize the language of verse 10, we discover that a more accurate translation fits the context perfectly, viz.:

> Thou wilt not abandon me to Sheol;
> Nor wilt thou suffer Thy holy one to see the pit.

The picture is that of Sheol reaching up its greedy claws like a ravenous monster clamoring for the speaker's life. But Yahweh intervenes and delivers his saint from premature death. Similar representations appear in Pss. 30:3; 89:48; 86:13; 9:13; 33:19; 56:13. Life and death are under the control of God; the

wicked are sent down to Sheol in hot haste, but of the pious the good God says:

> With long life will I satisfy him,
> And show him My deliverance [Ps. 91:16].

An exact parallel to our passage is furnished by Ps. 30:4:

> O Yahweh, Thou broughtest me up from Sheol;
> Thou didst keep me alive that I should not go down to the pit.

This is no rescue occurring after death; it is rather an intervention just in time to save from death, "Thou didst keep me alive."

The next passage is not so easily understood, viz., Ps. 17:13–15:

> Arise O Yahweh, confront him, cast him down;
> Deliver me from the wicked, by Thy sword;
> From men, by Thy hand, O Yahweh;
> From men of the world—may they have their portion in life;
> May their body be filled with Thy stores;
> May their children be sated,
> And may they leave the rest to their babes.
> But I—I shall see Thy face in righteousness,
> When Thou awakest I shall be satisfied with Thy appearance.

The text of this passage, especially in verse 14, is very uncertain and we have to translate at a venture. At any rate, it is clear that the speaker is calling for Yahweh to protect him against the ungodly. If this rendering of verse 14 be in the right direction, the language here is slightly ironical. The "stores" of Yahweh are the punishments he has on hand for the wicked. In keeping with the general spirit of such Imprecatory Psalms, the poet calls for the infliction of the wrathful punishments of Yahweh upon the children of the wicked even to the third generation. But turning from the fate of the sinner, the psalmist briefly expresses his assurance of his own triumphant vindication. "Righteousness" here is used in the same sense as in Isaiah, chapters 40–55, where it almost uniformly means "vindication." Yahweh is thought of as exercising his righteous power and so bringing vindication to Himself and His people in the sight of the world. Our poet confidently looks for this when Yahweh awakes from his

period of inactivity and apparent slumber. This representation is in keeping with his summons to Yahweh to arise in verse 13. The psalmists do not shrink from speaking of Yahweh as indulging in a nap. Cf. 44:24,

> Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Yahweh?
> Arouse Thyself, cast not off for ever.

Similar language appears in Pss. 35:23 and 59:6. There remain the vivid phrases "see Thy face" and "satisfied with Thy form (or appearance)." These are poetic and figurative expressions and do not contemplate an actual seeing of the divine countenance or person. This appears at once when we compare with our passage such passages as 22:25:

> For He has not despised nor abhorred the lowliness of the poor;
> Neither has He hid His face from them;
> But when they cried unto Him He heard.

And Ps. 44:26:

> Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face,
> And forgettest our affliction and our oppression?

Cf. also for similar phraseology Pss. 10:11; 11:7. In similar fashion the law requires

every male in Israel to go up to the sanctuary three times in the year "to see the face of Yahweh" (Exod. 23:17). Indeed, this same mode of expression appears in Babylonian religious literature, where one writer says to the goddess Ishtar, "I beheld thy face." On seeing the face of Ishtar, cf. Zimmern, *Hymnen und Gebete*, I, 10, where Ishtar is besought thus: "with thy shining face look at men faithfully, at me!" It has been suggested that the phraseology "see the face of Yahweh" was due to influence of Babylonia where worship of the planets gave rise to such terms. But the phrase is far older in Israel than the period of Babylonian influence, e.g., Exod. 23:17. What is meant by such expressions is, of course, the gracious manifestation of Yahweh's power in behalf of the speaker. While the wicked are to suffer the penalty of their sins at the wrathful hand of Yahweh, the pious and saintly are to see His face shining graciously upon them in the outflowing of blessings. The word "likeness"

or "form" adds nothing to what is implied by "face." The "face" is indeed a part of the "form" and both words are alike used in a figurative sense of the divine intervention in defense and vindication of the oppressed saint. Indeed in Deut. 4:12, 15, it is distinctly impressed upon the Israelites that they saw not Yahweh's "form" on Sinai; and while in Numbers, chap. 12, Yahweh says that Moses talks with Him face to face and sees His "form"; yet in that extraordinary passage Exod. 33:17–23, Moses is warned that he may not see the face of Yahweh and live. There, of course, the word is used in its literal sense. It goes without saying that no thinker in postexilic Israel ever dreamt of actually seeing the person of Yahweh in this life, at least, and our poet is evidently looking for his vindication here on earth. It is perfectly certain that the thought of the entire Psalm up to verse 13 is concerned with vindication at the hands of Yahweh in the world that now is, and it is not likely that there is any change in the scope of

the thought in the last stanza. Even if we accept the translation of the verb "awake" which makes it apply to the speaker rather than to Yahweh, it still remains true that the awaking is not that following death. It is rather from the present period of weakness and suffering which seems to the sufferer like an evil dream. Such sleep and awakening are spoken of elsewhere in the Psalter, especially in 30:5; 76:6 and 143:7, 8. A very interesting parallel to our passage is afforded by Ps. 73:20: "As a dream when one awakes, O Lord, so when Thou awakest, Thou wilt despise their likeness." One of the clearest expositions of the point of view of our poet in Psalm 17 is afforded in Ps. 39:5–14. There the brevity of human life is emphasized and in general its futility. Man's only hope is in God and that hope is interpreted as vindication in the sight of the world. If a man does not obtain this, what has he that is worth while?

Hear my prayer, O Yahweh, and give ear unto
my cry;
Keep not silence at my tears;

For I am a stranger with Thee,
A sojourner, as all my fathers were,
Look away from me, that I may take comfort,
Before I go hence and be no more.

We turn from such depressing views to seek a more cheerful outlook. Two more passages invite consideration. The first of these is Ps. 49:5–20. The text here unfortunately is not always intelligible having suffered many things apparently at the hands of transcribers. But with the adoption of some "corrections" we may attempt a translation:

Why should I fear when trouble comes,
When the malice of my persecutors surrounds me,
They who trust in their substance,
And boast of the bulk of their riches?
But no man can buy himself off,
Nor give to God a ransom for himself;
For the redemption of his life is too costly,
And he comes to an end for ever and aye.
And would he live forever and not see the pit,
Surely he sees that wise men die;
Yea, fool and dolt perish;
And they leave their substance to others.
Their grave is their house forever,
Their habitation for generation after generation;
Though they have called lands by their own names.

Man abideth not in riches;
He is like the beasts that perish.

This is the way of those who are self-confident;
And the path of those who delight in their own
speech;
They are appointed like a flock to Sheol,
Death shepherds them,
(The upright shall rule over them in the morning)
And their form must dissolve away.
Sheol is their dwelling.
But God will rescue me;
From the power of Sheol He will surely take me.
Fear not when a man becomes rich,
When the splendor of his house increases;
For when he dies he can take nothing,
His splendor does not go down after him.
Though while alive he congratulate himself,
(Men praise thee when thou doest well)
He will go to the generation of his fathers
Where they nevermore see light.
Man abideth not in riches,
He is like the beasts that perish.

The thought here is very clear. Why worry over the prosperity and power of the wicked? Do they not share in the common lot of death? And of what significance is a brief period of good fortune against the background of the great

human tragedy? Not only so, but the wicked are snatched away prematurely by Sheol; they do not live out half their days. But God saves his saints from such a dire fate. They come to their grave in a good old age, "As a shock of corn cometh in in its season." It is the divine care of the good in this life that concerns the poet. He has no vision nor hope of life after death. This statement holds good even if we follow the common rendering of verse 15, which runs. "God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; He will take me." This leaves the method and goal of the taking indefinite; but it remains true that Sheol is here thought of as balked of its prey, just as in Psalm 16, the speaker is convinced that he will escape Sheol. How he does not venture to predict. The closest parallel to the phraseology is in the story of Enoch (Gen. 5:24). "Enoch was not, for God took him"; and the one passage is just as indefinite and vague as the other. But the rendering of Ps. 49:15 here

adopted frees us from such vagueness and at the same time restores the balance of the verse, while calling for no change except the transfer of a punctuation point.

There remains but one more passage that calls for treatment, to-wit, Ps. 73:22–26. The writer has been setting forth his former state of mind as he gazed upon the blatant prosperity of the wicked. He envied them and resented keenly his own lot in comparison with theirs. But he then came to realize that his state of mind was unworthy of a child of God, for the wicked stand in slippery places and are suddenly hurled to utter ruin. In the light of this fact, he chides himself, saying:

> But I was brutish and knew nothing;
> A very beast was I in thy presence.
> For I am continually with Thee,
> Thou holdest my right hand.
> Thou guidest me by Thy counsel.

These lines beautifully express the sense of fellowship with God. They breathe forth the spirit of trust and dependence

that characterize the attitude of a little child toward its father. This intimate feeling of inner communion between man and God is the glory of the Psalter. It is that which has made it supreme in the devotional literature of humanity. This is the heart and soul of true religion.

There follows, however, immediately upon these splendidly spiritual words, a phrase which is an integral part of them and must complete their thought and bring it to a climax. Unfortunately we cannot be sure of the meaning of this phrase and still more we are in doubt as to the soundness of the text. Passing over the latter problem and taking the text as it stands, the best treatment of the grammar yields the following rendering: "And afterward Thou wilt take me gloriously." This is, of course, open to the charge of vagueness. All that we can say, supposing the translation and text to be correct, is that the poet looks forward to a glorious vindication at the hands of God, and that, probably, this vindication

is conceived of as awaiting him in a hereafter. This conclusion is somewhat venturesome in view of the fact that this is the only passage in the Psalter in which the hope of a life beyond the grave is brought forward. This is strange, for if the hope were present at all, we should expect it to occupy a relatively large place. It would be wholly out of the question if the Psalter were the work of but one or two men. No man who believed in a worthful existence after death could discuss the problem of suffering from as many angles as appear in the Psalter and fail to make use of his hope for the future as a solvent. But the Psalter is the product of many minds and it is, of course, possible that the writer of Psalm 73 is not represented by many songs in our collection, and that he alone of all the psalmists entertained some vague hope of a glorious life to come.

However that may be, the fact remains that there is practically no thought of life after death in the Psalter as a whole. If

we were to let the balance of probability go and were to read life after death into every passage in the Psalter which would admit of it, it would still be true that the allusions to life after death would be amazingly few. But in this respect the Psalms do not differ essentially from the Old Testament as a whole. The Jews were apparently incapable of imagining life as being carried on anywhere except on earth. Consequently, when they do think of life after death, it is in terms of a resurrected life, the dead coming back again to life in the world. This was the characteristic Jewish thing. Immortality was the product of Greek thought, and came to find adoption in later Jewish and Christian thought. But even this resurrection life plays but a small part in the Old Testament. There are but two passages in which it clearly appears, viz., Isa. 26:19 and Dan. 12:23.

The reason for this is twofold. First and most important is the fact that the thought of existence after death lay out-

side of the religion of Yahweh in early times. It was a part of primitive Semitic religion. When Yahwism came to Israel, it found this instinctive repulsion to annihilation already on the ground. All that the earlier exponents of the religion of Yahweh sought to do with it was to keep the people from abusing the belief in existence after death by necromantic practices. It was not till relatively late in Hebrew thought-history that the realm of existence after death was taken over and incorporated within the limits of the religion of Yahweh itself. It was one of the last primitive pagan elements to be incorporated and purified.

In the second place, life after death did not bulk large in the Hebrew Psalter because the life that now is was so interesting, so enthralling. And particularly so, when we recall that the psalmists were, like the prophets, primarily concerned with the life of the community and not with that of the individual. Now the community is self-perpetuating; it is

immortal. Generation succeeds generation world without end. The problem of existence did not present itself so vividly in the case of the group as such. And this group-life was a matter of large moment to the Psalmists. It absorbed their energies and embodied their hopes. If the Jewish people and the Jewish religion go on and prosper the Psalmist is willing to disappear from view. His highest hopes and aspirations are fulfilled. The individual feels himself absorbed in the group and finds his larger satisfaction in sharing the group consciousness.

The noteworthy thing about the absence of emphasis upon the future life in the Psalter is the fact that the lack of a vigorous and vital hope of a life after death did not paralyze the ethical or religious interest in Israel. To use a hackneyed phrase, it did not "cut the nerve" of religion. The reason for this lies in the fact that the Hebrew insisted that religion should pay its way as it went. He placed no reliance upon deferred dividends. He

felt that the values of religion were to be realized by the individual in the present world. But more than this, he went on to define those values in spiritual terms. While the best men in Israel never got wholly away from a somewhat materialistic valuation of religious good, yet they did more and more emphasize the distinctively spiritual and ethical meaning of life. Communion with God is the outstanding note of the religion of the psalmists. With God at his side, the Hebrew was able to face all his foes, material and spiritual, and to triumph in the realm of the spirit even when routed on the field of battle. In no book of pious meditation and lofty aspiration is the sense of the actual presence of God in human experience more vividly present than in the Book of Psalms. These poets walked and talked with God. They found him a source of refuge when beaten back by the advance of sorrow and disaster; they sought new strength from him when exhausted by the strain of watching and

waiting for the fulfilment of deferred hopes; they shared with him their joy when fortune turned and light broke in upon their darkness. Fellowship with God is for the Hebrew the supreme good.

As the hart panteth after the water courses,
So panteth my soul after Thee, O God,
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God;
How long till I come and see the face of God?
[Ps. 42:23].

Yahweh is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
Yahweh is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?
[Ps. 27:1].

V

THE IDEA OF GOD IN THE PSALMS

Let us remind ourselves again that the Psalter was the hymn book of the Jewish people as a whole. Consequently we shall not expect to find therein the thought of experts on any subject. The ideas of God that it contains will be, for the most part certainly, those held by the plain man. We shall see what aspects of the conception of God really functioned in the life of the man on the street. We ought not to expect to find the most exalted and abstract or philosophical conceptions of God in the Jewish hymnal any more than we do in our own. Some such ideas do occasionally crop out, but they are not the ideas that bulk large in the thought and speech of the psalmists.

The wonder, indeed, is that the thought of God in the Psalter is as noble and lofty as it is. This wonder grows upon us as

we learn more accurately and definitely just how the average Jew thought about God in the early postexilic age. The Jewish religious thought of that age, or more particularly of the fifth century B.C., is vividly presented to us in the papyri discovered in 1906–7 at Elephantine on the Nile, and commonly known as the Assouan papyri after the name of the town lying on the river bank just across from the island of Elephantine. These papyri contain private and public documents belonging to a colony of Jews located at this point and serving as mercenaries in the Persian army. These documents are of various sorts, some being records of real estate transactions and other business deals, others having to do with religious and social matters. They illustrate the religion of the colony in a very informing way. These Jews had a temple and priesthood of their own devoted to the worship of Yahweh and they spared no zeal or cost in the equipment and upkeep of this sanctuary with its staff. All this is

natural and as it should be. But upon going through the papyri, we find that other gods than Yahweh were likewise recognized and held in high honor. Not only so, but Yahweh himself actually shares his gifts with two subordinate gods, the one composite deity bearing the name Anath-Bethel, and the other Asham-Bethel. Indeed, in one case, Yahweh is himself given a female consort, who is known by the composite name Anath-Yahweh. This at once reminds us of such composite deities as Ashtar-Chemosh of Moab and Atargatis of Phoenicia. Yahweh's very temple and ritual seem to have made room for some of these goddesses. When to these facts is added the further item that the personal names of the members of the Jewish colony contain the names of nearly a dozen different gods and goddesses as component elements, it is at once clear that the religion[1] of these

[1] For a more complete statement of the religion of the Assouan colony, see my article "Jewish Religion in the Fifth Century B.C.," *American Journal of Semitic Languages*, July, 1917, pp. 322 ff.

fifth-century Jews was practically a form of polytheism in which Yahweh was assigned the place of chief God. All the more wonderful is it then that from the Jewish Psalter practically every trace of polytheistic thought has disappeared, and that the thought of God is so presented in the Psalms as that for the most part it has ministered effectively and inspiringly to the religious need of the Jewish and Christian worlds alike all through the succeeding centuries.

As indicative of the great advance beyond a crass polytheism that some of the psalms reflect, we may bring together those passages from the Psalter that represent Yahweh as the God of the Universe, the only God. This view of God appears in the ascription of omnipotence to Yahweh. He is the Creator and Controller of the Universe:

> The heavens are telling the glory of God,
> And the expanse publishes the work of his hands.
> Day unto day pours forth speech,
> And night unto night declares knowledge.
> There is no speech; nor are there words;

Their voice is not heard.
Yet their voice has gone forth in all the earth,
Their words to the end of the world.
[Ps. 19:1–4].

Thoughts like these meet us frequently in the Psalter.[1] Yahweh is the Lord of the thunder.[2] He is the God of history, ruling and overruling the thoughts and intents of men from the beginning.[3] He is the source and the continual sustainer of all life.[4] He is the mighty, yea, the omnipotent God.[5] But this unlimited power is coupled with commensurate wisdom. Yahweh is omniscient; he is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of men; while his own ways are past finding out.[6] He is the inescapable, omnipresent God.[7]

[1] Pss. 8:4; 24:2; 33:6 ff.; 74:13–17; 78:69; 89:10–14; 90:21; 95:4 f.; 96:5; 100:3; 102:26; 107:23 ff.; 115:15; 146:6; 147:8, 9, 16–18; 148:5–13; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3.

[2] Ps. 29:3 ff.

[3] Pss. 22:29; 24:1; 78; 136; 105:12–44.

[4] Ps. 104:10–30.

[5] Pss. 135:6; 93:4; 77:17–20; 78:12–16.

[6] Pss. 94:8–11; 145:3; 147:5; 139:1–6.

[7] Ps. 139:7 ff.

Possessing these characteristics, it is quite in keeping that Yahweh should also be thought of as the timeless, the age-long, eternal God.[1]

O Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place through all generations;
Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever the earth and the world were formed,
Even from age to age thou art God.
Thou returnest man to dust,
And thou sayest, "Return, O sons of men.
For a thousand years in thine eyes
Are but as yesterday when it is past,
And as a watch in the night" [Ps. 90:1–4].

A God like that is incomparable; he is unique;[2] he is, of course, the only God.[3] Idols therefore are futile; they are worse than useless; they represent non-existent beings. It is hardly worth while to compare or contrast Yahweh with them:

All the gods of the nations are nonentities,
But Yahweh made the heavens [Ps. 96:5].

Our God is in the heavens,
He has done whatsoever he pleased.
Their images are silver and gold—

[1] Pss. 102:25–28; 105:8; 145:13; 146:10.
[2] Pss. 40:6; 113:5; 77:14; 86:8; 89:7, 9.
[3] Ps. 18:32.

The work of men's hands.
Mouths have they, but they speak not.
Eyes have they, but they see not.
Ears have they, but they hear not.
Noses have they, but they smell not.
Hands have they, but they touch not.
Feet have they, but they walk not.
Like unto them shall be those who make them,
Whosoever trusteth in them [Ps. 115:3–8].[1]

One psalm seems on the face of it to recognize the gods and therefore calls for examination:

God stands in the divine assembly,
In the midst of the gods he judges:
"How long will you judge perversely,
And show favor toward the wicked?
Execute justice for the poor and the fatherless;
Give the afflicted and destitute their rights;
Deliver the poor and the needy;
From the power of the wicked rescue them."
They know not, nor do they understand,
They walk in darkness.
All the foundations of the earth totter.
I said, "You are gods,
And all of you sons of the Most High;
Yet like men you shall die,
And like one of the princes you shall fall."
Arise, O God, judge the earth,
For thou shalt take possession of all the nations.
[Ps. 82:1–8]

[1] See also 96:4; 97:7; 135:5, 15–18.

It is at once evident that God is here, represented as calling to account those who have been responsible for the administration of justice upon the earth. In dramatic fashion he calls them together and denounces them, threatening them with death. Who are these judges? They are described as "gods" and as "sons of Elyon" which means the same thing. Yet "gods" do not "die." Indeed as verse 7 says, their death will show them to be mere mortals. The probable meaning of all this is to be found in the fact that the rulers of the ancient world, who had exercised sway over Israel, were frequently acclaimed as divine and given the title and worship belonging to gods. The psalmist then is speaking ironically when he talks of "gods," but with bitter seriousness when he reminds these vain rulers that they must share the common lot of man and die.

The idols being ruled out of the universe as nonentities, their place is given to a body of angels who serve as the mes-

sengers and agents of God in his dealings with men. These angels are not prominent in the Psalms, being mentioned but four times. In 103:20 f. they are spoken of as Yahweh's messengers, ministers and doers of his will, and they are thought of as very numerous, being addressed as "all his hosts." In 91:11 f. the pious are assured of Yahweh's providential care as mediated through his angels:

> For he will give his angels charge concerning thee,
> That they shall keep thee in all thy ways;
> Upon their hands they shall bear thee up,
> Lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

The same care of the pious is exercised by the "angel of Yahweh" in Ps. 34:8. But the converse of that appears in Ps. 35:5, 6, where the "angel of Yahweh" is assigned the task of hurrying headlong the wicked who are flying "like chaff before the wind" and of pursuing hard after them as they stumble in "dark and slippery" ways.

Yahweh, who is exalted to the throne of the universe by the psalmists, is of course thereby made ruler over all the

nations. He is the judge of all the earth.[1] But in this capacity his main concern seems to be the punishment of the peoples of the earth. There is no thought anywhere in the Psalms of the love and tenderness of Yahweh toward mankind at large, such as we find in the Book of Jonah, for example, and in some parts of Isa. 40–66. The Psalter is a nationalistic hymnal and its God is thoroughly loyal. For though Yahweh is the only God, he is nevertheless primarily thought of as Israel's God, and his interests are naturally and inevitably the interests of Israel. He is spoken of as the "Shepherd of Israel,"[2] the "God of Jacob,"[3] while Israel in turn is his son.[4] He "loves the gates of Zion"[5] and makes Mount Zion his dwelling-place.[6] He is true to his own people, keeping all his promises with them, and he is their sure refuge from all their foes.[7] But his inter-

[1] Pss. 7:9; 9:5, 9, 20; 96:10–13; 110:6.

[2] Ps. 80:2. [4] Ps. 27.

[3] Ps. 94:7. [5] Ps. 87:2. [6] Ps. 74:2.

[7] Pss. 3:4 ff.; 4:9; 5:12, 13; 6:10; 18:31; 31:24; 37:40; 94:14, 22; 111:5; 106:45; 121:4.

est in Israel does not prevent him from inflicting severest punishment upon her for her sins; he may even forsake and cast off Israel forever.[1] His wrath, however, is reserved mainly for his enemies, viz., Israel's foes, whom he laughs to scorn[2] and utterly destroys.

It is not among such transcendental aspects of the divine nature as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, universality, and uniqueness that the psalmists love to linger. They are much more apt to present Yahweh to us as a very human sort of God. He is intensely personal in all Hebrew literature and nowhere more so than in the Psalter. He is here presented to us as a great, indeed an incomparably great, man. He is credited with all the attributes of man. The psalmists carry their personification of God so far as not to shrink from assigning even human limitations to him. Of course, personality itself is a limitation,

[1] Pss. 74:1; 90:7 ff.; 108:12; 106:40; 102:11.

[2] Pss. 143:11; 2:4; 5:11; 73:27; 94:23; 97:3 ff.

but they go far beyond that. He shares some of the frailties of human personality, and is presented in a thoroughly anthropomorphic way. He has a face, with eyes, ears, nose, and mouth.[1] He has arms, hands, and feet.[2] He breathes, swallows, and talks.[3] He grows weary and may take a nap.[4] He becomes angry and executes vengeance upon the wicked;[5] but his anger may quickly come and as quickly go.[6] On one occasion, indeed, Moses actually turned back Yahweh's wrath.[7] Appeals are constantly made to his pride; he must intervene in his people's behalf for the sake of his own name, i.e., his reputation among men.[8] He needs and is

[1] Pss. 80:4; 33:6, 18; 11:7; 34:16 f.; 17:5; 27:8; 30:8; 31:3; 14:3; 1:17; 32:8; 18:9, 16; 102:3; 105:4; 143:7; 116:2; 119:125.

[2] Pss. 32:4; 18:36; 20:7; 21:9; 80:18; 98:1; 138:7; 118:15, 16.

[3] Pss. 18:16; 33:6; 21:10; 102:3.

[4] Pss. 73:20; 78:65; 7:7; 35:23; 95:10.

[5] Pss. 18:48; 99:8; 137:7 ff.; 2:5, 12; 90:7 ff.; 94:1 f.

[6] Ps. 30:6.

[7] Ps. 106:23.

[8] Pss. 102:16; 143:11; 106:8; 109:21, 27; 115:2; 74:18, 22 f.; 79:9–13.

provided with a home; sometimes his dwelling-place is in the heavens and again it is on earth, in the Temple at Jerusalem.[1] He is credited with a great love of praise. This characteristic appears in the name of the Psalter which is "Praises." It is shown by the great amount of praise that is expressed in the Psalms. The last five psalms, each beginning with "Hallelujah," i.e., "praise ye Yahweh," are nothing but ascriptions of praise from first to last. This weakness is made use of in a fine argumentative way by some of the psalmists. Yahweh is not thought of as being above considerations that affect his own advantage; he is a God that may be reasoned with. Loving approbation as he does, he naturally will not wish to act in any way so as to diminish the volume of his praise.[2]

Mine eye languishes by reason of affliction;
I have called upon thee, O Yahweh, every day,

[1] Pss. 102:20 f.; 99:1; 91:9; 123:1; 115:3, 16; 135:21.

[2] Pss. 115:17 f.; 89:39–52; 40:10–12; 6:5, 6; 10:1–13; 30:9, 10; 35:27 f.; 74:10 f.; 83:19.

I have spread forth my hands unto thee.
Wilt thou work wonders for the dead?
Or will the shades arise and give thee thanks?
Will thy mercy be declared in the grave?
Or thy faithfulness in Abaddon?
Will thy wonders be known in the dark?
And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?
[Ps. 88:10 ff.].

Yahweh is so human as that he must bind himself by an oath that he will not forget nor fail to keep his promises.[1] He may change his mind and fail to carry out an original intention, which procedure is known as "repenting himself."[2] He may even meet like with like and outdo the cunning man with his own subtlety:

With the pure thou showest thyself pure;
But with the crooked, thou dost deal tortuously.
[Ps. 18:27].

We recognize at once that in such representations as the foregoing, the psalmists are but attributing to Yahweh the feelings and attitudes that are characteristic of men. This is what mankind has done always and everywhere. We cannot

[1] Pss. 132; 95:11; 132:11; 105:9, 10; 106:26; 110:4.
[2] Pss. 135:14; 90:13.

think of anything or anybody in terms outside of our own human experience. We naturally consider ourselves as belonging to the highest order of life, at least on our own planet. Therefore in conceiving of God we as a matter of course describe him in terms of our own human experience. If we were animals and were able to conceive of a god, we should describe him in terms of animal life; if we were angels, in terms of angelic or divine life. Consequently when the psalmists speak of the noble and divine aspects of Yahweh, they naturally do so in terms of those qualities which they regard as ideal in human beings.

If Yahweh must be thought of in human terms, it is natural that he should be represented under the guise of those types of men most highly honored by their fellows. One favorite way of picturing him is as a great king.[1] With this function, he naturally appears also as a judge,[2] and that of

[1] Pss. 74:12; 22:29; 24:1; 84:4; 93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1; 103:19, 22; 123:1; 145:1–13; 146:10.

[2] Pss. 7:9; 9:5, 9, 20; 75:8; 82:1, 8; 94:2; 96:10, 13; 98:9; 110:6.

all the earth. In a world that was full of wars and rumors of wars, it would be strange if Yahweh were not thought of at times in terms of military efficiency.[1] The surprising fact is that there is so little of this sort of thing. Yahweh is a mighty warrior, a strength and shield, the destroyer of his foes, a mighty God, a rock of defense, a high tower, a fortress, a deliverer, a terrible and awful Being, and the leader of innumerable hosts. In these and related aspects of his character, Yahweh is indeed a fearful and awe-inspiring God:

> My flesh shuddereth for fear of thee;
> And I am afraid of thy judgments
> [Ps. 119:120].

> Thou—terrible art thou;
> And who can stand before thee?
> From the heavens thou didst announce judgment;
> Earth feared and was quiet,
> When God arose to judgment,
> To deliver all the meek of the earth.

[1] Pss. 18:47; 19:15; 24:8–10; 31:4; 28:7; 33:20; 76:8–13; 77:17–20; 78:12–16; 88:1, 15; 84:12; 91:2; 94:22, 23; 95:1; 96:9; 97:3 ff.; 99:3; 115:9–11; 118:8, 9; 114:7; 111:9.

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee;
The residue of wrath thou shalt gird upon thee.
Vow and pay unto Yahweh your God.
Let all who surround him bring gifts to the
terrible one.
He restrains the spirit of princes;
Terrible is he to the kings of the earth
[Ps. 76:8–13].

Closely allied to these terrifying and awe-inspiring characteristics of Yahweh is his holiness. Very little is said of this quality in the Psalter.[1] That is because holiness is a metaphysical concept pertaining to the essence of the divine being. It is not a moral quality; least of all is it a human quality. Thus it does not play a conspicuous rôle in the psalmists' thought. Holiness is that which constitutes Godhead—it is the very essence of deity. It is that which distinguishes God from man. Just as humanity is the essence of the human, so holiness is the essence of the Divine. It lies beyond the range of human experience as the exclusive char-

[1] Pss. 22:4; 97:12; 98:1; 99:3, 5, 9; 103:1; 108:8; 111:9.

acteristic of another order of beings; it may, therefore, be predicated of Yahweh, but little attempt is made to expound the content of the term or define its limits. In this connection we may note also the thought of Yahweh as able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart in a way far transcending all human possibility.[1] He likewise surpasses even the greatest of kings in that all his plans carry through; they do not fall short of completion.[2]

It is in more familiar terms, however, that the psalmists prefer to speak of Yahweh. Just those qualities that good men covet for themselves are most frequently predicated of Yahweh. He is a good and upright God, who loves righteousness and demands justice and himself exercises the function of a just judge over all the earth.[3] By virtue of this characteristic, he may be depended upon to reward the

[1] Pss. 7:10; 139:1–6.

[2] Ps. 33:10, 11.

[3] Pss. 11:7; 7:9; 9:5, 9, 20; 25:8; 85:15; 86:5; 92:16; 98:9; 103:6, 17; 111:7, 8; 112:4; 116:5.

pious and faithful Jews.[1] One of the things without which access to his presence is impossible to any man is the requirement of a righteous life.[2] Yet his conceptions of righteousness and justice are so far superior to those of man that none can pass examination at his bar unscathed:

> O Yahweh, hear my prayer; give ear to my supplications;
> In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.
> But enter not into judgment with thy servant,
> For before thee can no man living be justified.
> [Ps. 143:1, 2].

On the one hand this righteousness of God's gives Israel confidence. For if Yahweh is just and righteous he must and will vindicate the righteous on earth and not permit the wicked to triumph over them forever. His own reputation is at stake. Therefore the psalmists look forward to a day when Yahweh's vindication of justice will be displayed to Israel's advantage and his own glory in the utter downfall of all oppressors. In view of

[1] Pss. 40:5; 73:1; 1; 4:4; 31:20; 37:4, 22.
[2] Ps. 15:1, 2.

some such manifestation of the divine justice as this or in vivid anticipation of it, one psalmist triumphantly celebrates the event thus:

O sing unto Yahweh a new song,
For he has done marvelous things;
His right hand and his holy arm have wrought deliverance for him.
Yahweh has made known his deliverance;
His righteousness has he revealed in the sight of the nations.
He has remembered his mercy and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel;
All the ends of the earth have seen the deliverance of our God [Ps. 98:1–3].

On the other hand the righteousness of God might well plunge Israel in despair. For if none can satisfy the demands of the divine justice, what chance is there for Israel? But it is just here, at the crucial point, that the large-hearted humanity of Yahweh saves the day. He is not only a just judge, he is much more—a tender, merciful, and forgiving God.[1]

[1] Pss. 78:38 f.; 85:3; 86:5, 15; 89:1, 15; 90:17; 98:3; 99:8; 100:5; 103:3, 4, 11, 13, 14, 17; 106:1; 107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31, 43; 108:5; 109:21, 26; 111:4; 112:4; 115:1; 117:2; 116:5; 118:1–4, 29; 119:68, 77, 124, 156; 130:4, 7; 136; 138:2, 8; 145:9; 146:7–9.

Yahweh is full of compassion and gracious,
Slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.
He will not always chide,
Nor will he keep his anger for ever.
He has not dealt with us after our sins,
Nor requited us according to our iniquities.
For as the heaven is high above the earth,
So great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has he removed our transgressions from us.
Like as a father has compassion upon his children
So has Yahweh compassion upon those who fear him.
For he knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust [Ps. 103:6–14].[1]

It is this beneficent side of the divine character that the psalmists constantly bring to mind. They are the songsters of a needy people. God must be to them a comfort, a helper in time of trouble, a strength and stay. So he appears as the deliverer of the poor and needy;[2] a shepherd caring solicitously for all the needs of his flock;[3] the embodiment of loving kindness and faithfulness;[4] tenderly

[1] Cf. 145:8, 17; 147:11.

[2] Pss. 9:13; 10:7 f.; 14:6; 22:25; 94:17–19.

[3] Ps. 23.

[4] Pss. 36:6, 8, 11; 92:3; 100:5; 119:88, 90, 138.

thoughtful of the sick and suffering saint, healing all his diseases;[1] a covert from the storm and a cooling shade in the sweltering heat;[2] a bountiful dispenser of good things;[3] and the preserver of the lives of his saints.[4] It is this way of thinking about God that makes possible the beautiful and pathetic appeal with which Psalm 22 opens:

My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
Why are the words of my cry far from my deliverer?
My God, I cry by day; but Thou answerest not;
And by night, and I am not silent.
Yet Thou art holy,
O Thou that dwellest in the praises of Israel;
In Thee our fathers trusted;
They trusted and Thou didst rescue them.
Unto Thee they cried and were delivered;
In Thee they trusted and were not ashamed.

But I am a worm, and not a man,
A reproach of men, and despised of people;
All that see me laugh me to scorn.
They open wide their mouths at me; they wag
their heads,

[1] Pss. 41:4; 103:3.

[2] Ps. 91:1–4.

[3] Ps. 116:12.

[4] Ps. 97:10.

(Saying) "Let him commit himself unto Yahweh,
that He may deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, inasmuch as He delights in
him."

But it was Thou that didst bring me forth from
the womb,
That didst make me to trust while I was at my
mother's breast.
Upon Thee was I cast from birth;
From my mother's womb Thou has been my God.
Do not be far from me when trouble is nigh,
When there is none to help [Ps. 22:1–11].

This sense of intimate fellowship and communion with God inspires certain parts of Psalm 73:

But I am continually with Thee;
Thou holdest my right hand;
Thou guidest me by Thy counsel;
And afterward Thou wilt take me gloriously.
Whom have I in the heavens?
And in none but Thee have I pleasure on earth.
My flesh and my heart fail.
The rock of my heart and my portion forever is
God.
For, behold, those who are far from Thee shall
perish.
Thou destroyest every one that is disloyal to Thee.
But I—the nearness of God is my good;
I have put my confidence in the Lord Yahweh,
That I may tell of all Thy works [Ps. 73:23–28].

Nothing is more characteristic of the psalmists than their longing for and appreciation of fellowship with God. This is for them the highest good. This conviction finds expression in various ways:

I have no good beyond Thee [Ps. 16:2].

In Thy presence is fullness of joy [Ps. 16:11].

I shall be satisfied with Thy form [Ps. 17:15].

I delight to do Thy will,
Thy law is within my heart [Ps. 40:8].

As the hart panteth after the water brooks
So panteth my soul after Thee, O God [Ps. 42:1].

He that dwelleth in the secrecy of the Almighty
[Ps. 91:1].

The nearness of God is my good [Ps. 73:28].

The beautiful imagery of the Shepherd Psalm (23) reflects clearly the poet's sense of fellowship with the Divine, and, the strongest influence in the direction of a belief in a worthful future life was the force of the longing for a continuation in a life beyond the grave of that blessed fellowship with God already experienced in the life on earth.

If fellowship with God was the *summum bonum* of man, it follows as a matter of course that estrangement from God was the worst of all calamities:

> I am become like the slain that lie in the grave
> Whom Thou rememberest no more,
> And they are cut off from Thy hand [Ps. 88:6 ff.].

This is the tragedy of death, that it cuts off the normal fellowship of the saint with God. But that fellowship is by no means guaranteed to any man even as long as he lives; it is his privilege only so long as he complies with the conditions that make it possible. Sin of all sorts brings its punishment in many ways, not the least serious of which is the loss of divine fellowship. Hence there arise those psalms that express a deep longing for forgiveness and a sincere repentance and confession of wrong:

> Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions;
> According to Thy mercy remember Thou me,
> For Thy goodness' sake, O Yahweh,
> For Thy name's sake, O Yahweh,
> Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great [Ps. 25:7, 11].[1]

[1] Similarly Pss. 25:18; 32:5; 51:1 ff.

This forgiveness of sins is a blessed thing:

> Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven,
> whose sin is pardoned.
> Happy is the man to whom Yahweh does not
> charge iniquity,
> In whose spirit is no guile [Ps. 32:1, 2].

The penitent soul is accepted of Yahweh and is admitted to his inmost favor:

> Yahweh is nigh to them that are of a broken heart,
> And such as are of a contrite spirit [Ps. 34:19].

The sense of sin in the Psalter is not overwhelming. The soul is not crushed by its weight. The element of confession and repentance is not conspicuously present. There is nothing abnormal or in any sense unnatural about the psalmists' attitude toward God. They lament and complain fluently of the hard lot of their people and themselves, but they do not undertake to hold themselves wholly responsible for all that has befallen them. Their misfortunes are due not so much to their own faults as to the malevolence of their foes. However, they recognize clearly that Israel cannot expect to enjoy

the favor of God except as her people conform to his demands and these demands are primarily in the sphere of ethics.

This attitude of intimate fellowship with a divine person has been a permanent contribution of Hebrew religion to Christianity, and the popular use of the Psalms in Christian worship has done much to make this conception of God permeate the church. The God of the Psalter is in a very real sense akin to us; he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and in many, if not in all, points tempted like as we are. The psalmists were not praising and praying to an abstract, philosophical principle. They were not feeling after a metaphysical notion or a mystical something. Their God was force, wisdom, and the like; but he was much more. He represented these abstract principles all embodied in a person and fused together in a wonderful personality. This is another way of saying that the God-idea of the Psalms was not the product of philosophy or of science, but of religion. The thought

of God was not the product of the study or the laboratory, but sprang warm and glowing from the hearts of practical men wrestling heroically with the problems of everyday life. Yahweh was not the God of an esoteric group; he was the God of the man on the street. This common man made his idea of God in response to the needs of his own soul. That accounts in part for the popularity of the Psalter and for the profound impression it has made upon human experience. It has helped us to believe in a good and gracious God, whose heart is concerned for the achievement and conservation of the same great ethical and spiritual values that are dear to the hearts of men. It has helped us to keep alive in our souls the sense of our divine kinship. It has brought the God of the Universe down into the simple homes and loyal hearts of the plain people.

From so genuinely human and intimately personal an idea of God it was but a short step to the acceptance of Jesus

as the actual Son of God. It is this same sense of an intensely personal quality in the Godhead that Browning's Saul so vividly expresses:

> O Saul, it shall be
> A Face like my Face that receives thee; a Man like to me
> Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever; a hand like this hand
> Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee:
> See the Christ stand!

APPENDIX

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